



# ABYSSINIA AND ITALY

by

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## FOREWORD

THIS BOOK has been written immediately after the opening of Italy's armed attack on Abyssinia. Its aim is to show the deeper causes which lie behind the events and diplomatic history of recent months. Therefore the record of these events, and of the constant efforts made by Britain, France and Italy to penetrate Abyssinia, leads to the question: what have these Powers to gain from colonial expansion? This is answered by an analysis of Imperialism—an analysis which also gives the reason why Fascism shows itself on the international field in a particularly rabid drive for expansion. Then the changed international situation which has made it possible for the League of Nations to act is examined, and also the problem involved in the development of the colonial peoples. Particular attention is paid to the various views expressed in the Labour movement on League sanctions and the prevention

## FOREWORD

of future wars. I believe that these are the issues which are uppermost in everyone's mind at the present time. None of the practical questions of policy can be answered merely on the basis of the "case" of Italy or Abyssinia. What is necessary is an understanding of the stage in human history which has brought about a world in arms.

EMILE BURNS

*October 25th, 1935.*

## I

### • ITALY ATTACKS ABYSSINIA<sup>1</sup>

ON OCTOBER 3RD, 1935, Italian aeroplanes bombed the Abyssinian towns of Adowa and Adigrat, and at about the same time Italian forces from the Italian colony of Eritrea on the Red Sea invaded the frontier of Abyssinia opposite Adowa. There had been no declaration of war, no ultimatum, no precise demands put forward by the Italian Government and rejected by the Abyssinian Government. The official communiqué issued in Rome, reporting the opening of hostilities, contained one reason for the invasion. The first paragraph stated:

“ Yesterday, the 3rd, at 5 a.m., divisions of the army, Blackshirts and native troops, *in order to repel the imminent Abyssinian threat*, crossed the frontier . . . ”

<sup>1</sup> The official name of the country is Ethiopia, but as it is generally called Abyssinia this name has been used except in quotations from official documents.

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The "imminent Abyssinian threat" was the mobilisation order issued by the Emperor of Abyssinia after the Italian forces and all the equipment of war had been pouring into the Italian colonies bordering on Abyssinia for seven months, and when everyone in the world realised that an Italian invasion of Abyssinia was imminent.

As for the bombing of Adowa and Adigrat, the communiqué explained that:

"Two bombing squadrons, in reply to a violent fusillade from rifles and artillery, bombarded Abyssinian armed forces centred round Adowa and Adigrat."

Just as the invasion of Abyssinia was purely a defensive measure, therefore, the bombing squadrons were forced to defend themselves against a violent fusillade!

No one believed these explanations. It is difficult to imagine that the Fascist Government of Italy expected them to be believed. It was obvious to the whole world that the invasion and the bombing of these towns was the deliberate opening of a war for which Italy

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had made the most careful and extensive preparations over many months.

But the cynicism of the Italian Government's report of the opening of hostilities was in keeping with the cynicism which that Government had shown all through the year in relation to the projected attack on Abyssinia, and also in its subsequent Note to the League of Nations attempting to justify the attack after it had begun. This "justification" was put forward in the announcement to the League of Nations on October 3rd (the day of the attack) that hostilities were about to begin. This document represented the Abyssinians as contemplating aggression, the Italians as taking measures of defence :

"The warlike and aggressive spirit developed in Ethiopia among leaders and soldiers who have been insistently demanding for some time past and have succeeded in bringing about war against Italy, has found its last and strongest expression in the order of general mobilisation announced by the Emperor in his telegram of September 26th. . . .

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In face of this situation the Italian Government has found itself compelled to authorise its supreme commander in Eritrea to take the necessary measures of defence."

It is not necessary to examine all the Italian Government's statements in connection with the frontier disputes and incidents of 1934 and 1935. The Abyssinian Government tried to get them settled by arbitration or decision of the League of Nations. After persistent obstruction by the Italian Government, the main incident, an armed conflict at Walwal in November 1934, was settled by a Commission which reported on September 4th, 1935, that no blame attached to either of the Governments concerned. That incident was therefore closed. But the frontier dispute which lay behind the incident was not closed.

Walwal itself is near the south-eastern corner of Abyssinia—the corner formed by the boundaries of British Somaliland on the north-east and Italian Somaliland on the south-east. Apparently until after 1925 no one, not even the Italian Government, contested the fact that

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it was in Abyssinian territory. Both the *Times* Atlas of 1920 and the maps published in Italy up to 1925 show Walwal well within the borders of Abyssinia—about sixty miles from Italian territory. But in more recent years—apparently in 1929 and 1930—Italian troops occupied the area, and in any case were there in November 1934, when an Anglo-Ethiopian Commission arrived at that point. This Commission had been appointed to settle the routes to be taken by nomad tribes grazing over the border from British Somaliland, and its presence at Walwal was in itself an indication that the British authorities considered the area to be in Abyssinian territory.

Therefore the shooting that took place a few days later, on December 5th, resulting in the killing of 30 Italian negro troops and 107 Abyssinians—apart from the number wounded—was on Abyssinian territory. And although (as is usual in such incidents) there are contradictory reports of who began the shooting, the presence of Italian troops at that point, and their opposition to the Commission's body-guard using some of the wells, was completely

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unjustified and in itself an act of aggression. But following on the shooting at Walwal itself, the retreating Abyssinians were bombed by Italian aeroplanes, and three days later, on December 8th, an Italian aeroplane bombèd Ado, from which the Abyssinian wounded and the Commission's baggage were being removed.

The Italian Government claims that the frontier at that point had never been agreed; but the contrast between its attitude and that of the Abyssinian Government is significant. The Abyssinian Government charged the Italian Government with aggression, and asked for arbitration under the Treaty of 1928 between Italy and Ethiopia, article 5 of which provides that:

“ Both Governments undertake to submit to a procedure of conciliation and arbitration disputes which may arise between them, and which it may not have been possible to settle by ordinary diplomatic methods, without having recourse to armed force. Notes shall be exchanged by common agreement

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between the two Governments regarding the manner of appointing arbitrators."

The Italian Government's reply was:

"(1) The incident of December 5th occurred in such clear and manifest circumstances that there can be no doubt of its nature ; viz., that it consisted of a sudden and unprovoked attack by Abyssinians on an Italian outpost.

"(2) The Abyssinian Government asks that the case be submitted to arbitral procedure. The Italian Government does not see what question could be submitted to this procedure.

"(3) Accordingly, the Italian Government must insist that the reparations and apologies due to it as a consequence of these events be made as soon as possible."

These "reparations and apologies" were to be: apologies from the nearest Abyssinian Governor; a salute to the Italian flag at Walwal (i.e., an acknowledgement that Walwal was

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Italian territory); punishment to the Abyssinian troops involved in the incident; and £20,000 compensation for the Italian dead and wounded.

On December 14th, 1934, Abyssinia made a protest to the League of Nations against the Italian refusal of arbitration, and from then until September 1935, when at last the matter was settled, the Italian Government's attitude was hostile to arbitration, to discussion by the League of Nations, or to any step towards a peaceful settlement, while the Abyssinian Government consistently tried to secure such a settlement, through arbitration or decision by the League, of the two vital points:

- (1) Who was responsible for the actual incident at Walwal;
- (2) The boundary between Italian Somali-land and Abyssinia in that region.

The Walwal incident is certainly not the cause of the war; from a formal standpoint, it was settled by the agreed report of the Commission on September 4th, 1935. But as it was

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one of the "aggressive acts" of Abyssinia advanced by the Italian Government as the ground for its war preparations, it has been necessary to show just how far the whole affair was evidence of aggression, and on whose part.

Of course, the Italian Government's attempts to justify its attack on Abyssinia have not been limited to its presentation of the Walwal incident. It has advanced a number of other reasons in its Notes to the League of Nations and to other Powers; yet other reasons have been put forward by Mussolini in his various speeches. As the date for the opening of the planned attack approached, these "reasons" became more and more sweeping and cynical, culminating in the explanation given for the bombing of Adowa which has been quoted above.

In January 1935, Mussolini took over the post of Colonial Minister in the Italian Government (he was already Minister of seven other departments). He sent out General de Bono as Governor of both Eritrea and Italian Somaliland. In February mobilisation began in Italy, and

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from February 17th onwards there were continuous shipments of troops and supplies of war material to Eritrea and Italian Somaliland. On February 13th the Abyssinian Envoy in Rome was assured by the Italian Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs that Italy had no aggressive designs; Mussolini declared that the measures taken were "precautionary and defensive." The Italian Fascist General Council issued a statement approving "the military measures recently taken to guarantee security and peace in our East African colonies."

In short, the Italian Government's attitude was entirely peaceful—"no aggressive design," "precautionary and defensive" measures, "to guarantee security and peace."

This tone was maintained during March and April, while the Italian Government despatched increasing numbers of troops and auxiliaries and supplies of all kinds to Eritrea and Somaliland. And by May the Italian Fascist Government felt already strong enough to change its tune: the "precautionary and defensive" note disappeared, and was replaced by Press and official attacks on "barbaric survivals" in

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Abyssinia, and Italy's duty (on behalf of civilisation, of course) to bring order and civilisation to Abyssinia, as against "a sterile and anarchical régime that tyrannises over enslaved peoples and creates dangerous disturbances on the borders of its territories already won over for pacific and productive civilised labour."

By June Italy's military preparations were so well advanced that Mussolini felt able to go a stage further. On June 8th, reviewing troops before their departure to Africa, he abandoned both the "precautionary and defensive" and the "civilisation" arguments, and declared an *offensive policy in defiance of civilised opinion* in the following passage:

"We have old and new scores to pay off; we shall pay them off. We shall give no attention to what may be said beyond our frontiers, because the judges of our interests, the guarantors of our future, are ourselves, and ourselves only."

On July 7th, again addressing troops, Mussolini made his *offensive* policy even more explicit:

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“ Our decision is irrevocable. There can be no turning back. Government and nation are now engaged in a conflict which they have decided to carry on to the bitter end. The Italians have always thrashed black people in warfare. The defeat at Adowa was an exception.”

It is not necessary to quote Mussolini's further speeches during August and September; they were identical in tone and grew more and more bombastic until his final speech on the eve of the attack on Adowa. On Wednesday, October 2nd, Mussolini ordered the long-prepared test mobilisation of the Italian nation at home and abroad, and broadcast a fiery oration which was the prelude to the military communiqués of the following day. The central point in this speech was the declaration that the Italian Government had had one aim, and one aim only, from the beginning of its war preparations—not “defence” or even vengeance for “old scores,” but quite simply and openly: colonial expansion.

“For many months the wheel of destiny

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under the impulse of our calm determination moves towards a goal. In this last hour the rhythm has become faster and cannot now be stopped.

“It is not only an army which marches towards its goal, but 44 million Italians who are marching in unison with this army, because an attempt is being made to commit the blackest injustice against them, that of refusing them a little place in the sun.”

The “place in the sun” was the chief slogan of Imperialist Germany’s war preparations leading up to 1914; it has also, in effect, been Japan’s slogan in her attack on China.

For twenty years Italy, according to Mussolini, had been expecting that place in the sun as a result of joining the Allies against Germany, but “when they came round the conference table of that mean Peace Treaty, we got only the crumbs of that rich colonial dinner.”

The rest of the speech was only incidental. He referred to Abyssinia as “a barbarous and indelibly-branded African country, unworthy

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of ranking among civilised people." He appealed to the French and British people to give him a free hand, combining this appeal with threats in his usual bombastic style of how he would hit back if anyone attempted to restrain him by applying sanctions under the Covenant of the League of Nations.

The speech was printed in the Press throughout the world on the following morning, October 3rd, 1935, and later papers carried the reports of the bombing of Adowa and the crossing of the frontier by large Italian forces. The war of conquest openly announced by Mussolini had already begun.

Why was Abyssinia the victim? Chiefly because the ruling class of Italy knew that a war of conquest for any other part of Africa—or indeed of the world—would involve Italy in a war with States whose military strength was considerably greater than Italy's. Abyssinia was the only country in Africa—that is, the only country within Italy's effective reach—which was not already owned, "protected" or otherwise controlled by another Power. And undoubtedly the ruling class of Italy counted

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on support from the ruling class of France and, to some extent, of Great Britain—but the story of the long and varied attempts made by the Italian Government to win over the French and British governments belongs to later chapters.

Apart from Abyssinia being, in the Italian Government's opinion, the easiest prey for colonial ambitions, over the past fifty years the ruling class of Italy has conducted systematic campaigns, diplomatic and military, to gain control of Abyssinia. It is an old aim; there are "old scores" to be paid off; there is capital invested in Eritrea and Somaliland which could be made infinitely more profitable if the potential wealth of Abyssinia was developed by Italian capital, apart from the new opportunities for capital investment which that development would bring. There is therefore not only the *general* desire of Italian monopoly capitalists to find new spheres of investment; there is also the *particular* desire to turn to more profitable account the ports and docks and warehouses, the railway in Eritrea and the road systems in both Eritrea and Somaliland.

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The potential wealth of Abyssinia was in fact the main goal in the occupation and development of those colonies.

Italian industrial capitalism was late in its development. North Africa was the most obvious region in which it could find opportunities for protected trade, and at a later stage, for investing the capital built up on the surplus labour of the Italian workers. But by the 1880's Britain and France had already established control of the most useful regions of North Africa—Egypt, Algeria and Tunis, and to some extent Morocco. It is true that Tripoli was left for Italy; but Tripoli offered few economic inducements. It is almost entirely desert, and the population was 1 per square mile. (Tunis, occupied by the French, numbered 39 inhabitants per square mile.)

The capitalists of Italy had therefore to look elsewhere for their opportunities. There was a possible jumping-off point at Massawa, on the Red Sea coast of Africa below Egypt; an Italian shipping company had acquired coaling stations there in 1869, and in 1882 the Italian Government took them over and began a

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military occupation of the hinterland. After varying military fortunes in the long conflict with local chiefs—including a crushing defeat in 1887—the Italian Government succeeded in establishing relations with Menelik, then King of Abyssinia, and in 1889 the Treaty of Ucciali was signed, conceding certain territory to Italy and acknowledging Italy's possession of Eritrea.

There is no doubt that the ruling class of Italy regarded this as merely the first step to the military occupation of the further hinterland and in fact of all Abyssinia. But the process was not so simple. The natural features of the country made any military campaigns difficult enough; but in addition the various tribes inhabiting Abyssinia are born fighters, proud of their independence, and although the central government has at times been weak and unable to control the tribes, on occasion the latter unite readily enough against a foreign invader.

The Italian Government was soon to learn this lesson. The continual encroachments by Italian forces were stubbornly resisted; and

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when the Italian Government ordered the occupation of the Abyssinian province of Tigre in 1895, Menelik denounced the Treaty of Ucciali and led his armies into battle. In 1896 an Italian army advanced to Adowa; in March of that year it was surrounded and almost annihilated. It is this defeat which was "avenged" nearly forty years later, in October 1935, by the bombing of Adowa and the killing of women and children, with the subsequent occupation of the undefended town by Italian forces equipped with the most modern instruments of war.

The defeat at Adowa in 1896 put an end, for the time being, to the immediate designs of Italian military conquest of Abyssinia. But in the meantime Italy had acquired a new foothold to the south-east of Abyssinia—Italian Somaliland. Between 1889 and 1892 the Italian Government had established a protectorate over Benadir (nominally subject to the Sultan of Zanzibar) and other coastal territory controlled by various independent chiefs; this area became Italian Somaliland. Like Eritrea, it is not of great economic importance in itself;

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but the ultimate value of both Eritrea and Italian Somaliland to the Italian capitalists depended on the subjection or at least economic exploitation of Abyssinia. After Adowa, therefore, the Italian Government turned its activities from attempts at military conquest to diplomatic attempts to obtain economic concessions in Abyssinia.

The French Government had obtained possession of another strip of coast in that area, now known as French Somaliland, and during the period of Italian conflict with Abyssinia, the French obtained a concession in 1894 to build a railway from the port of Jibuti to Addis Ababa, the Abyssinian capital. Incidentally, the concession was given largely in return for supplies of arms and munitions with which Menelik fought and finally defeated the Italian invaders; the French capitalists won the battle of Adowa in more senses than one. France had won the first round in the fight for the economic exploitation of Abyssinia; the main external trade of central and eastern Abyssinia—capable of enormous development—was in future to pass through French territory.

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It is true that the railway was only started in 1897 and was not completed for many years; but the point in relation to Italy is that her ruling class, after the military defeat at Adowa and the diplomatic defeat of the Jibuti railway, turned its attention to the prospects of exploiting the wealth of the western part of Abyssinia. This was formally recognised by an agreement of 1906 between Italy, France, and Britain, which recognised:

“ The interests of Italy in Ethiopia as regards Eritrea and Somaliland (including the Benadir) more especially with reference to the hinterland of her possessions and the territorial connection between them to the west of Addis Ababa.”

The treaty also indicated that, apart from the Jibuti railway, already French, Britain was to have all railway construction east of Addis Ababa, and Italy all railway construction west of Addis Ababa.

But although the three Powers might agree on the division of the economic exploitation of Abyssinia, none of these projects could be

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realised without the consent, voluntary or forced, of the Abyssinian Government. And this consent was not to be had for the asking. Coercion of Abyssinia was the only way out, and none of the three Powers cared to undertake it owing to the increasingly difficult situation in Europe.

The war of 1914 came ; in 1915 Italy deserted her allies and entered the war on the side of France and Britain. At the end of the war the Italian Government again raised the question of Abyssinia with Britain. The British Government, heavily committed to imperialist expansion in other areas, refused to consider joint action with Italy in Abyssinia. From then on the story of Italy's relations with Abyssinia is bound up with the varying French and British Governments' policy and with the League of Nations. But it must be noted at this point that in December 1925 the British and Italian Governments exchanged Notes agreeing to the Italian proposal made and rejected in 1919. The two paragraphs dealing with what Italy was to get out of the bargain were as follows:

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“ Italy requests the support of Great Britain in order that she may obtain from the Ethiopian Government the concession to construct and to run a railway from the frontier of Eritrea to the frontier of Italian Somaliland, which railway, according to the Tripartite agreement, must pass to the west of Addis Ababa. It is understood that this railway, together with all the necessary works for its construction and for its running, must have an entirely free passage across the motor road (which Britain was to build from the Sudan to Lake Tsana).

“ Italy requests from Great Britain, as she also reserves to herself the right to request from France, an exclusive economic influence in the west of Ethiopia and in the whole of the territory to be crossed by the above-mentioned railway, and the promise to support with the Ethiopian Government all the requests for economic concessions regarding the Italian zone.”

But in spite of all the changes in the world between 1906 and 1925, Abyssinia remained an

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independent country, determined to retain its independence and to resist the economic exploitation of its people by foreign capital as bitterly as it resisted their political subjection. War remained the only method of "pressure." And although the ruling class of Italy was unable in 1925 to embark on another Abyssinian adventure, it never lost sight of its goal: the "place in the sun" for Italian finance capital, freedom for Italian finance capital to build its projected railway through Abyssinia west of Addis Ababa, to drain off the trade of that area, and to open up the great mineral wealth which is believed to exist there.

This is the real reason for the invasion of Abyssinia so long prepared by the Fascist Government of Italy; this is the real reason for the bombing of civilians at Adowa, not revenge for an "old score"; this is the real reason for the scattering of gas bombs on the defenceless victims of the southern regions of Abyssinia, not the desire to bring civilisation to a "barbarous and indelibly-branded African country."

## II

### THE ATTITUDE OF THE BRITISH AND FRENCH GOVERNMENTS

FROM THE TIME of the Italian settlements on the Red Sea coast the British and French Governments have also been continuously interested in Abyssinia. As in all other colonial spheres, the Governments of the chief industrial countries have persistently tried to establish their own separate control of Abyssinia, although at certain periods they have been forced by circumstances to work with their rivals, and even agree to a division of the spoils which they hoped to win.

In the earlier period of European penetration of the north-east corner of Africa Italy hardly counted at all. Foreign capital—particularly French—began the penetration of Egypt in the 1850's. The Khedive of Egypt granted the Suez Canal concession to De Lesseps, a French subject. The canal was completed in 1869, by

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which date both British and French financial and industrial groups were opening up Egypt: port works at Suez and Alexandria, railway construction, irrigation canals, roads, bridges, sugar mills—and behind all of these, loans to the Khedive of Egypt.

It is not necessary to tell the story of how British finance, diplomacy and arms gradually secured, as against French interests, the domination of Egypt. What is of importance to the story of Abyssinia is, however, the fact that after the opening of the Suez Canal and the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, the safeguarding of the route to India became an important object of British Government action and diplomacy. On the other hand, the victory of British capitalism in Egypt was bitterly resented by French capitalism, and the struggle between them was transferred to the region south of Egypt—the Sudan, Abyssinia, and the African coast of the Red Sea and Indian Ocean.

In 1881 the French Government occupied a port on the Somali coast and in subsequent years extended its influence by the usual methods—a combination of force, fraud and

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purchase—until the present French Somaliland was established. This territory is at the southern end of the Red Sea, opposite the narrow strait joining the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden—that is to say, it commands an important point on the route to India. But it was also the first European foothold on the coast between the Red Sea and Abyssinia; and apart from its possibilities for trade and investment, Abyssinia contained the chief sources of the Nile, and its penetration by France was considered extremely dangerous to British interests.

As already noted, the Italian Government in 1882 began its occupation of what was to become Eritrea—the strip of Red Sea coast just north of French Somaliland. This was of advantage to British interests, as it checked French expansion northwards and thus prevented direct French communication with the Sudan—at that period and for many years after the chief arena of the conflict between British and French interests.

The next step taken by the British Government was to hem in French Somaliland from the south; this was done by the usual method of

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seizing, in 1884, the strip of coast which developed into British Somaliland. The occupation of the strip further south by Italy (1889-1892), Italian Somaliland, completed the coastal encirclement of Abyssinia. From that period on no one of the three Powers—Britain, France, Italy—could press forward its plans for the penetration of Abyssinia without taking into account the interests, expectations and possible reactions of its rivals.

It would be tedious to go through the whole of the complicated history of the subsequent relations between these three Powers and Abyssinia. The main lines, however, are clear enough. From 1880 until 1904, when the threat of German rivalry on a world scale made British and French capitalists compose their differences everywhere through the *Entente Cordiale*, the British and French Governments were continuous rivals in their separate relations with Abyssinia; and during this period British capitalism was prepared to make substantial concessions to Italian capitalist interests in order to secure their aid against the French. And in this period, as indeed also

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later, the government of Abyssinia successfully played off one group against the other—for example, it obtained French help for its resistance to Italian military aggression in 1894 to 1896; and at a stage when the French Government seemed to be becoming too pressing in connection with the Jibuti railway, it made use of the counter-pressure of the British and Italian Governments.

British concessions to Italian interests—made, it must not be forgotten, in order to win an ally against French interests—came out clearly in the Anglo-Italian agreements of 1891 and 1894. These agreements very definitely recognise almost the whole of Abyssinia as an Italian “sphere of influence”; L. S. Woolf, in *Empire and Commerce in Africa*, notes that a map published in London in 1894, with Foreign Office sanction, colours the whole of this “sphere of influence” green, including Italian Eritrea and Somaliland, and the whole area is called “Italian Abyssinia.” There can be little doubt that the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1894 to 1896 was intended to put into effect these agreements made with Britain, which

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wanted above everything else to see the French hemmed in and prevented from extending their influence in Abyssinia, and through Abyssinia to the Sudan.

But, strange as it may seem, the Abyssinians were not prepared to honour an agreement made between Italy and Britain for the spoliation of Abyssinia; they secured French help in arms and munitions, and defeated the Italian army at Adowa. In October 1896 a defeated Italy had to sign the Treaty of Addis Ababa, explicitly recognising Abyssinia's independence and fixing the boundary between Eritrea and Abyssinia. For the moment, the British plan of sacrificing Abyssinia to Italy as a measure directed against France was defeated. Moreover, Abyssinia had been drawn closer to France, and French interests had secured the first important economic concession in Abyssinia—the construction of the Jibuti-Addis Ababa railway—and the virtual establishment of a “sphere of influence” over the eastern part of Abyssinia which the railway was to traverse. There was no formal recognition by Abyssinia of French influence, of course; but it was clear

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enough to both the Italian and British Governments that the eastern part of Abyssinia must be left out of account in any future arrangements between them.

It is not necessary to trace the gradual weakening of French influence during the following years ; the British financial and diplomatic efforts to gain a share of control in the Jibuti railway ; the unsuccessful British proposal of a branch line to a port in British Somaliland ; and the separate British agreement of 1902 with Abyssinia, fixing the Sudan-Abyssinia frontier and guaranteeing Britain against any interference with the flow of water to the Nile.

The next important stage was the agreement of July 1906, between Britain, France and Italy. For the previous ten years Italy had played little part in Abyssinian affairs, and when Britain and France decided to settle their differences—as already explained, because of the general menace of German expansion, and also because German interests were offering to build railways in Abyssinia—Italy was simply dragged in. The most important point in the

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1906 Agreement was Article I, which provided that "France, Great Britain and Italy shall co-operate in maintaining the political and territorial *status quo* in Ethiopia." But the Article goes on to define the *status quo* more closely, including a reference to the Anglo-Italian agreements of 1891 and 1894. In other words, although the political and territorial *status quo* was formally guaranteed, the three Governments concerned in effect renewed their declarations of joint support in pressing forward their economic penetration of Abyssinia. And the later Articles went into details, Article 4 undertaking joint action to safeguard :

"The interests of Great Britain and Egypt in the Nile Basin, more especially as regards the regulation of the waters of that river and its tributaries . . .

"The interests of Italy in Ethiopia as regards Eritrea and Somaliland (including the Benadir) more especially with reference to the hinterland of her possessions and the territorial connection between them to the west of Addis Ababa.

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“The interests of France as regards the French Protectorate, its hinterland and the Jibuti railway zone.”

As shown in the previous chapter, Britain was to have any new railway construction in the eastern part of Abyssinia, Italy in the western part.

Although the Abyssinian Government again was not consulted in this allocation of its territory, the three Powers had in effect temporarily closed the period of active rivalry and agreed to act together—by peaceful penetration, of course—against Abyssinia. But in the difficult international situation between 1906 and 1914 it was not possible for the three Powers to carry their economic demands on Abyssinia to the point of pressure, and for the time being, Abyssinia was able to hold out against making any concessions whatever.

When the war of 1914 actually began, Italy was nominally an ally of Austria and Germany. As in 1894 Britain had offered Italy control over Abyssinia in return for resistance to

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France, so in 1915 France and Britain together offered Italy opportunities in Abyssinia in return for assistance against Austria and Germany. As usual, the terms offered were not precise, no doubt in order to avoid any awkward opposition from the Abyssinian Government. The relevant paragraph in the Treaty of London, signed in April 1915, ran as follows :

“ In the event of France and Great Britain increasing their colonial territories in Africa at the expense of Germany, those two Powers agree in principle that Italy may claim some equitable compensation, particularly as regards the settlement in her favour of the questions relating to the frontiers of the Italian colonies of Eritrea, Somaliland and Libya and the neighbouring colonies belonging to France and Great Britain.”

As it happened, at the end of the war none of the Powers was in a position to undertake any campaigns of conquest, especially against such a resolute people as the Abyssinians. Italy was particularly weak, and secured merely frontier adjustments ; as Mussolini puts it,

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Italy got only the crumbs of the "rich colonial dinner" enjoyed by Britain and France. But the important point arising from the Treaty of London in 1915 is the readiness of the British and French Governments to conspire for the actual violation of Abyssinia's territorial and political *status quo*, in spite of the most formal recognition by them of her independence and integrity.

A further point, however, is of immense significance in its bearing on the present position. In the months following the war and the defeat of the Central Powers British capitalism opened up separate negotiations with the Abyssinian Government for a concession to construct a barrage in Lake Tsana (the source of supply for the Blue Nile) and other connected works. The Italian Government thereupon offered to help Britain to secure this, in return for British support to the Italian request to Abyssinia for a railway and trading concession in Western Abyssinia. This offer was rejected by Britain mainly on the ground that it violated the Tripartite Agreement of 1906 to maintain the *status quo* in

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Abyssinia. But in fact Italy was only making a little more explicit the plans of economic penetration included in the 1906 Treaty. France, it will be noted, was not consulted: their joint defeat of Germany now left French and British interests in open rivalry.

By 1925 the rift between Britain and France had grown so deep that Britain was once again looking for an ally; the Italian offer of 1919, which Britain had then rejected, was now again taken up and mutually agreed—in spite of the fact that in 1919 the British Government had refused it on the ground that it involved a violation of the *status quo*. It was not until June 1926 that the contents of this agreement were notified to the Abyssinian Government, which lost no time in telling Britain and Italy what it thought of the agreement—"we should never have suspected that the British Government would come to an agreement with another government regarding our Lake." And neither Britain nor Italy were in a position to force their terms on Abyssinia.

Where did France come in during this period? At that time the French Govern-

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ment was helping Abyssinia to maintain her opposition to British penetration. In 1923 Abyssinia—no doubt encouraged by France—applied for admission to the League of Nations:

“We know that the League of Nations guarantees the independence and territorial integrity of all the nations of the world, and maintains peace and agreement among them; that all its efforts are directed towards the strengthening of friendship among the races of mankind; that it is anxious to remove all the obstacles to that friendship which give rise to wars when one country is offended; that it causes truth and loyalty to be respected . . .”

France and Italy were both among the supporters of Abyssinia's entry into the League; it was opposed for some time by Britain. By 1925 Britain had succeeded in detaching Italy from France—partly by means of the separate Anglo-Italian agreement mentioned above. But France's opposition to the agreement, and support of Abyssinia's independence, was all

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the more resolute, and when Abyssinia protested against the Anglo-Italian agreement to the League the British Government had to declare that neither Britain nor Italy had any intention of coercing Abyssinia or dividing her economically—though the agreement could hardly bear any other interpretation. One section of Abyssinia's protest to the League is worth quoting :

“ The people of Abyssinia are anxious to do right, and we have every intention of guiding them along the path of improvement and progress ; but throughout their history they have seldom met with foreigners who did not desire to possess themselves of Abyssinian territory and to destroy their independence. . . .

“ For this reason, prudence is needed when we have to convince our people that foreigners who wish to establish themselves for economic reasons in our country, or on the frontiers between it and their possessions, are genuinely innocent of concealed political aims.”

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Then once again the British Government made a new and separate move—without either France or Italy. The significance of this move requires explanation. From the time when French interests secured the Jibuti railway concession, British interests have all along tried to share in the advantages or to secure a rival line of communication which would draw traffic away from the French port; before the completion of the railway they made strenuous efforts to buy shares in it and also to secure an agreement for a branch line to a British port. In 1926, after the defeat of the Anglo-Italian proposals of 1925, British interests thought of a way of detaching Abyssinia from French influence, and at the same time diverting Abyssinian trade to a British—or British-financed—port. This way was to offer Abyssinia a corridor to the sea through British Somaliland to the port of Zeila; it involved the surrender by Britain of 600 square miles of territory. But once again Abyssinia also was not so blind as not to see the motives behind it: namely, to secure railway and port concessions, besides to bring about the general

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goodwill which would bring success to the negotiations for the Lake Tsana barrage. The British offer was rejected ; but the British Government had now succeeded in isolating itself from both France and Italy.

The next step was an independent move by Italian interests. In 1928 a new Treaty was signed between Italy and Abyssinia, once again guaranteeing Abyssinian independence, speaking in general terms of the development of mutual trade, and—the most important point for the present situation—undertaking to submit any disputes to conciliation and arbitration “ without having recourse to armed force.” And the very next year, 1929, Italian troops were sent across the Somaliland border to occupy the Walwal oases—the scene of the 1934 dispute.

*In any case, the position of the three Powers in 1929, so far as Abyssinia was concerned, was this: all three had agreed among themselves at various times to a division of Abyssinia into “ spheres of influence ”; each was trying at every opportunity to double-cross the others by separate approaches to the Abyssinian*

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Government ; but that Government's determination—and skilful use of one Power against another—had defeated every attempt at partition or large-scale economic penetration, apart from the Jibuti railway. And any attempt by one Power at military conquest, hazardous in itself, was rendered doubly hazardous by the jealous attitude of the other Powers. In the period between 1929 and 1934 there was no important change in the relations between these Powers and Abyssinia, no new factors which could have caused serious disputes. The events which made possible the Italian attack on Abyssinia in 1935 must therefore be looked for outside Abyssinia—in Italy itself, and in Europe.

The effects of the world economic crisis which began to develop in 1929 were particularly seriously felt in Italy. Unemployment rose above the million mark, and the agricultural population was severely hit by falling prices. The people began to show signs of discontent ; strikes and peasant revolts—although on a small scale—began to weaken the Fascist control of the country. At the same time, in

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spite of the depression the monopoly capitalist concerns were making large profits through the continuous reductions of wages; and because of the depression and the general reduction of the standard of living, the home market offered no inducement for the investment of these profits in capital equipment for production. The economic drive outwards on the part of the ruling class was therefore growing stronger from year to year; and this drive could only end in aggressive action against the weakest possible victim. And besides securing new markets and new fields for investment, war offered also the prospect of solving—for a time at least—the increasingly serious problems of unemployment and discontent. Accordingly propaganda for colonial expansion began to be more and more evident in the Government-controlled Press.

Fascist Italy's war propaganda has been as continuous as Fascist Germany's. The demand for colonial expansion as the way out of Italy's economic difficulties was raised from the earliest days of the Fascist régime: expansion in South-East Europe, in the Near East, in

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Africa. The most promising immediate outlet, apart from Albania, seemed at one time to be Arabia, where Italy succeeded in establishing a kind of protectorate over the Yemen—a part of Arabia almost opposite Eritrea, across the Red Sea. The treaty gave Italy a monopoly of the Yemen's foreign trade in return for supplies of aeroplanes and munitions. As a counter-move, the British Government strengthened its relations with Ibn Saud, ruler of the Hedjaz (also on the Red Sea coast of Arabia, north of the Yemen). Constant conflicts between the rulers of these two areas culminated in war in 1934; as a result, the Yemen forces were defeated, and were forced to surrender disputed territories. In other words, the expansion of Italy's influence and control in Arabia received a severe set-back—in June 1934—which must have accelerated the application of Italy's expansionist plans on the other side of the Red Sea—towards Abyssinia.

In another direction, too, Fascist Italy had been hemmed in. The southward extension of Tripoli (Libya) had been attempted at various times, against strong opposition from

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the tribes; but the ultimate obstacle was the fact that France had extended her West African territories two-thirds of the way across the continent, right to the Sudan. There were the usual frontier disputes, and considerable friction developed between France and Italy; but France was too difficult to tackle. In 1934, Britain, and in 1935, France, ceded certain territory which rounded off the southern frontier of Italian Libya; but the areas ceded were of little importance, and Libya was still hemmed in on all sides by British and French territory.

Thrown back in Arabia, hemmed in in Libya, and not too successful in its diplomatic penetration of South-Eastern Europe, the Fascist Government of Italy was therefore more and more compelled to look to Abyssinia as the only practicable outlet for its colonial ambitions—in less romantic language, for the surplus capital of the financial groups behind it. But although this was the general aim of the Italian Government from 1929 onwards, a series of other events was required before a war on Abyssinia could be practicable. In the first

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place, it was necessary for the Italian Government to feel relatively safe from attack in Europe; secondly, it was necessary for it to divide France from Britain so that the two Powers would not combine to defend their interests in Abyssinia, present and prospective, against Italian domination of that country.

France, on the whole, was just as implacably hostile to Italian designs as Britain. British interests were more directly affected by Italian encroachment on Abyssinia—partly because of the route to India, which any extension of Italian power in that area would threaten, and partly because of the water supply from Abyssinia to the Nile, as well as because of the general rivalry for the economic exploitation of Abyssinia itself. But France was also concerned in this rivalry and in a more general rivalry with Italy in the centre and south-east of Europe. Only a very considerable change in the relations between France and Britain in Europe could open up for Italian diplomacy the possibility of dividing them on the question of an Italian invasion of Abyssinia.

General encouragement to the Italian Fascist

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plans of expansion had been given by the Japanese aggression on China and Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations, as well as by German Fascism's withdrawal from the League and active preparation for war. For both of these developments and particularly for the League's inaction when Japan attacked China, the British National Government was largely responsible. And when in 1934 German Fascism developed a campaign for the absorption of Austria, and the German breed of Nazis assassinated the pro-Italian Austrian Chancellor Dollfuss, Italy's opportunity for establishing an alliance with France had come. Both Italy and France were vitally interested in preventing the German absorption of Austria; Italy needed French help to guarantee her against an attack on Austria from Germany when Italy embarked on the Abyssinian adventure; France needed Italian help in case of a German Fascist attack not only on Austria, but on France herself. And following on the preliminary understanding in connection with the German Fascist designs on Austria, on January 7th, 1935, an important agreement

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was reached between the French Minister, Laval, and Mussolini. In return for a promise of joint action in the event of a German attack on Austria, the French Government offered strips of territory to Italy—including a strip of French Somaliland adjoining Eritrea—and also some of the shares held by France in the Jibuti railway. There can be no doubt also that France promised Italy a free hand in the invasion of Abyssinia; the French semi-official Press immediately began to assure Italy that France would not offer any objections to Italy's action, and Laval's attitude throughout 1935, up to the actual outbreak of war, was to delay and damp down any action of the League of Nations.

But what was the fundamental factor that led to the French Government's reconciliation with Fascist Italy? The aggressive threat of Nazi Germany. Britain, however, is a far more valuable ally against Germany than Fascist Italy; and if France was thrown into the arms of Italy, it was only because the whole policy of the British National Government had made it clear that it was deliberately

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encouraging Nazi Germany's violations of the Versailles Peace Treaty and rapid rearmament plans. This policy, which had been obvious since 1934, was openly avowed in the Anglo-German Naval Treaty of June 18th, 1935.

The British National Government was therefore directly responsible for creating the opportunity for which Italian Fascism had been waiting.

Then, finding itself faced with the result of its policy in the shape of Italy's obvious preparations to invade Abyssinia, the British National Government attempted to find some way out which would in effect be a partition of Abyssinia between Italy and Britain—to the disadvantage of France. The way out proposed to Italy by the British National Government was that Abyssinia should grant territorial concessions, while Britain should generously compensate Abyssinia by a strip of territory constituting a corridor through British Somaliland to the port of Zeila! Some sturdy British patriots protested against this generosity with British territory; they presumably knew nothing

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of the attempt made by the British Government in 1926 to give away this corridor to Abyssinia, as a move to get railway concessions and win a part of Abyssinia's foreign trade from the Jibuti railway and French interests. The British Government's renewal of the offer in June 1935 was a clumsy attempt to do a deal with Italy, not only at Abyssinia's expense, but also at the expense of France. It is not surprising that Mussolini rejected the offer, and that its only result was to give France fresh grounds for antagonism to Britain and friendship with Italy.

And once again, repeating all past history in the relations between Britain and Abyssinia, after the failure of its attempt to buy off Italy with an Anglo-Italian agreement at the expense of Abyssinia and France, the next step of the National Government was to support an "all-in" agreement at the expense of Abyssinia. This proposal was contained in the report of the Committee of Five set up by the League of Nations.

The proposal covered the following points, which amounted to creating the conditions for

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the complete subjection of Abyssinia to foreign capital :

1. The appointment of Commissions of Foreign Specialists to organise a corps of police and gendarmerie throughout Ethiopia:
2. At the same time the organisation of the following public services in Ethiopia is to be placed under foreign control: Foreign trade; Public works and communications; Posts, Telegraphs and Telephones; Finance, including the drawing up of the budget and the supervision of the State expenses; Justice; Education; and Public Health.
3. The appointment by the League of Nations of a special League delegate and four principal advisers to be placed at the head of each of the groups of public services above mentioned. Foreign agents, other than the principal advisers, to be appointed by the Emperor of Ethiopia, but on the nomination or with the endorsement of the League delegate.
4. Territorial concessions to Italy in return for an outlet to the sea for Abyssinia through

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British and French territory in Somaliland. Security to be assured for the Italian colonies of Eritrea and Somaliland by the detachment of territories like the Ogaden and Danakil regions.

The Committee of Five stated that under its proposals the independence and territorial integrity of Abyssinia would be respected; but a careful examination of the points shows the inevitable consequences of this form of League "assistance."

Nevertheless, the Abyssinian Government was ready to do all that it could to maintain peace.

The Abyssinian standpoint in regard to the proposals of the Committee of Five was communicated by Mr. Teclé Hawariaté to the Council and Members of the League of Nations on September 23rd, 1935; it was to the effect that the Ethiopian Government had constantly called attention to the principles of, firstly, the respect due to the independence, territorial integrity and security of all States members of the League; and secondly, the necessity of

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ensuring good relations between the States members of the League. In continuance of this policy, it agreed with the Committee that the disinterested collaboration and assistance of the League, given in response to the request freely addressed to it by Ethiopia, in the exercise of her full sovereignty, was desirable, and that it should take the form suggested by the Committee.

In an interview with the *Manchester Guardian* special correspondent (published on September 27th, 1935) the Emperor insisted that final control must remain with his Government:

“We are always willing to welcome collaboration, but it must be carried out under our responsibility and authority. There can at no time be any question of a mandate or a protectorate, which would violate our sovereignty.”

Other points made in the interview were that the Abyssinian Government had no objection to considering proposals of railway construction, but would not agree to one connecting the two Italian colonies.

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The Italian Government, however, refused this attempt at "conciliation" or division of the spoils; it apparently still felt confident of support from the French Government, and believed that decisive action would be met only by indecision on the part of the British Government. It therefore continued its preparations and on October 3rd opened its war of conquest.

But its calculations of French support and British indecision proved to be ill-founded. It is true that there was hesitation and delay; but in the end both France and Britain associated themselves with action through the League of Nations. The story of the part played by the League of Nations belongs to a later chapter. It is perfectly certain, however, that it could not have acted, even to the slightest extent, against the wishes of the British and French Governments. And the whole history of British and French relations with Abyssinia shows that British and French Governments have at all times been as ready as the Italian Governments to sacrifice the independence and territorial integrity of Abyssinia, if thereby

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some advantage could be gained for British and French economic interests. This has been as true in 1935 as it was in 1915 or in 1894.

It is therefore necessary to ask precisely why the British and French Governments are now associated with opposition to Italy's war of conquest. And the answer is not far to seek. History shows clearly enough the reasons for British capitalist opposition. These reasons certainly do not include any loyalty to the League Covenant, any sentiment of justice or admiration for a small but courageous nation which has kept the greatest Powers of Europe at bay for sixty years. The reasons for British opposition to Italy's aggression are much less intangible than loyalty to the League Covenant, and although the specific influence of each factor cannot be known, these reasons include:

- (1) fear of Italy's gaining too strong a hold in North-East Africa, endangering British interests in Egypt and the Sudan and also the route to India;
- (2) fear that the attack on Abyssinia may be the starting-point of a general revolt of

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African peoples against their European masters ;

(3) a desire to share in the spoils, and therefore to prevent any independent control of Abyssinia by Italy.

The reasons for the French Government's recent attitude are much less simple. French interests also fear the extension of Italy's territories in North-East Africa, and in any case they want a division of the spoils ; they may also have some fear of the unsettling effect of the war on their own subject peoples in Africa. But after all, these reasons were already in existence when the January 1935 agreement with Italy was concluded. There can be no doubt therefore that the French Government's main preoccupation is the threat from Germany, and that this consideration, which brought France and Italy together, also lies at the back of the unwillingness of the French Government to offend either Italy or Britain. Therefore, in the present stage, the French Government supports sanctions—since this is British policy—and at the same time it is not

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anxious to apply them—since this would bring conflict with Italy; and on the whole it desires to maintain the authority of the League of Nations, because this represents the biggest possibilities of united action in defence of France if attacked by Germany. Finally, there is the very strong pressure of the “People’s Front” in France.

For these varied reasons the British and French Governments were at last to some degree united in opposition to Italy’s aggression, and for these varied reasons these same governments are at any moment ready to come to a separate or joint agreement with the Italian Government in order to bring the war to an end at the expense of Abyssinia.

To each imperialist State, the fate of the smaller States is not of the slightest importance in itself, but is taken into account only in so far as it affects the general balance of power and constitutes an advantage or disadvantage to rival States. This general international situation is considered in later chapters; but before considering it, it is necessary to examine, first, the reasons why the industrially-advanced

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States are constantly striving for colonial expansion, and secondly, why at the present stage aggressive action has first been taken by Italy. These are the subjects of the next two chapters.

### III

## THE ECONOMIC CAUSES OF THE DRIVE FOR EMPIRE

THE HISTORY of European relations with Abyssinia is only exceptional in so far as Abyssinia has succeeded in maintaining its political independence and a considerable measure of economic independence. In other respects it merely repeats the history of the relations between all industrially-developed countries and industrially backward countries. In the days before the imperialists thought of "bringing civilisation to backward countries" as the justification for bringing other peoples into subjection and seizing their territories, the usual justification advanced was that they were taking Christianity to the heathen. There is a solid historical basis for the comment said to have been made by one such heathen: "The missionaries say: 'Look up!'—And when you look down again the land is gone." As far back

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as 1865 the Emperor Theodore II of Abyssinia told M. Lejean, then representing France, that he would not allow French Roman Catholic missionaries in Abyssinia. The reason was simple :

“I know the tactics of European Governments when they desire to acquire an Eastern State. First they send out missionaries, then consuls to support the missionaries, then battalions to support the consuls. I am not a rajah of Hindustan to be made a mock of in that way: I prefer to have to deal with the battalions right away.” (Quoted by L. S. Woolf in *Empire and Commerce in Africa*, p. 145.)

Theodore II's shrewd thrust was however incomplete: he did not attempt any explanation of *why* the battalions were sent—what were the motives underlying the actions of European Governments in their persistent drive to acquire colonies. Even in 1926 the Abyssinian Government's statement to the League already quoted put the question in the same form—“throughout their history they (the Abyssinians) have

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seldom met with foreigners who did not desire to possess themselves of Abyssinian territory and to destroy their independence"; there is also a reference to the "concealed political aims" of foreigners "who wish to establish themselves for economic reasons in our country." This in effect repeats the Emperor Theodore's statement—consuls, or foreigners with professed economic aims, have behind them "battalions," concealed political aims.

It is natural enough that this should be how the actions of European Governments appear to the rulers of industrially backward countries; economic aims, just as missionaries and consuls, appear to them merely as the cover for the political aim of conquering the territory concerned, and this political aim appears as the motive force in the whole process. This reading of events, however, is putting the cart before the horse: it regards political control as the central aim and object of the whole process, and economic aims take only a secondary and more or less unreal position, auxiliary and preparatory to the final aim of conquest.

Curiously enough, this territorial conception

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of imperialism, which is naturally held by peoples whose political structure is based on a semi-feudal economic structure, is also the conception held by " patriots " and others who regard the extension of a country's territories as something desirable in and for itself: they feel all the bigger and better the wider the areas coloured red or green or yellow on the map of the world. And this naïve survival of ideas belonging to a bygone feudal period is carefully fostered in the State-controlled schools and in the Press of the imperialist Powers.

To take another sentence from the Abyssinian statement of 1926, " we cannot but realise that economic influence and political influence are very closely bound up together." This is universally admitted ; but it is necessary to go further and examine which is the cause and which the result, in order to be able to understand the root causes not only of the present Abyssinia conflict, but also of wars in general and the whole state of the world at the present time.

In the early stages of development of trade between countries the important factor was

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the distribution of natural resources and the type of handicraft in each country. At a later stage, the development of national States in Europe with considerable military and naval strength made a more "progressive" policy possible. The establishment of trading points outside Europe was supplemented by large-scale robbery of less "advanced" peoples, particularly in the New World. Occasional and sporadic robbery gave place to more permanent and systematic robbery through systems of levies and taxation, as in many parts of the East. In the New World a certain amount of colonisation developed, largely based on the labour of slaves imported from Africa. But until the development of industrial capitalism the volume of foreign and colonial trade was relatively small; from 1700 to 1780, for example, British imports and exports together had not risen above £30,000,000 annually.

With the rise of industrial capitalism in Britain, and later in other countries, foreign and colonial trade grew rapidly, and with it came the establishment of more trading points in colonial areas. These trading points, and

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the increasing "hinterland" controlled by them, were as a rule quite openly the territories of trading companies—of which the East India Company is perhaps the best known example. There was no nonsense then about bringing civilisation to backward races; the companies represented groups of merchants and bankers, and their job was to extend trade and squeeze as much as they could out of the colonial peoples with whom they were in contact, for the direct benefit of their employers. This form of colonial expansion continued throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, and in certain areas, well into the second half. It was mainly based on trade, and the forcible occupation of territory was either a continuation of the plunder system or for the purpose of establishing new trading points and opening up wider stretches of hinterland to the manufactures of capitalist industry; another motive was the bringing back of local products to serve as raw material for this industry, or as food for the industrial population.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, however, the basis of colonial expansion

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gradually changed, owing to a change in the industrial structure of the most developed industrial countries. The industrial capitalism of the earlier period had been based on the small family concern, with small units of production and a relatively small capital. But the accumulation of profits in the hands of the manufacturers, and of the merchants who sold the products at home or abroad, was very unevenly distributed. The industrial capitalists—those who owned the means of production and transport—began to be divided into large capitalists and small capitalists. It was the same with the merchant capitalists and bankers. And the larger capitalists began to absorb the smaller ones. Between 1844 and 1889, 131 private banks and 50 joint-stock banks were absorbed by amalgamation; the process has continued, of course, until practically the whole banking system is now concentrated in the "Big Five." What is important is that the same process of concentration of capital showed itself in every branch of industry and trade.

Not only was there concentration within each branch; there was also a considerable linking

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together of enterprises in different branches, and in particular a growing control over industry by financial concerns. This was partly due to the need of financial help in the floating and extension of the big industrial units required by modern technical methods; partly to the fact that the banks, controlling vast resources, were able themselves to set up big industrial concerns (especially in Germany and the United States); and partly because banking involves loans to concerns or companies, and in periods of bad trade an enterprise which is in debt to a bank usually ends by being under that bank's control. In Germany and the United States the process of the unification of financial and industrial and trading interests was more obvious than in Britain, because the controlling shares of the companies set up or taken over were held by the banks. In Britain this has not been customary, and the process of unification of these interests is best seen in the seats held by directors of banks on the Boards of Directors of industrial and commercial companies. Of course this does not necessarily mean Bank

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control of these concerns ; but it certainly does mean a concentration of interests—the merging of industrial capital with financial capital. The following figures give the number of other directorships held by directors of the Bank of England and the Big Five Banks at different periods :

1880: 157

1913: 352

1927: 971.

The extent of this concentration, and the tremendous mass of capital concentrated under the control of a numerically small group, appears even more clearly when the rapidly increasing size of the concerns is taken into account. The average size of the 157 associated concerns in 1880 was certainly small ; the 971 associated concerns of 1927 included such giants as Imperial Chemical Industries, with a capital of £60,000,000 and affiliated enterprises all over the world.

Another aspect of the process of concentration was the growth of monopolies in one section of industry after another ; and it was just the monopolist concerns which were most closely linked with the big Banks.

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This whole process of industrial concentration and monopoly and the merging of industrial and financial interests took place in every country where industrial capitalism reached a certain stage of development. The facts are very clearly and convincingly stated, for example, in J. A. Hobson's *The Evolution of Modern Capitalism*, and the facts and their theoretical explanation are given in Lenin's *Imperialism*. In any case, the process has been so obvious, and has now reached such proportions in every country, that it is not necessary to prove it statistically.

But the political results of this concentration of industry and finance are not quite so obvious. At all times the government of each country has readily enough come to the aid of particular capitalist groups which have fallen into difficulties in their foreign or colonial enterprise. This was only natural, because even apart from the personal interests of members of the government at various times in such concerns as the East India Company, they came from the same social group as the directors and principal shareholders, and they had themselves

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other similar interests. But as great masses of capital became concentrated in fewer and fewer hands the connections with the State became firmer and more continuous: at least some members of the leading group of capitalists were concerned directly in every development of foreign or colonial policy, in every foreign country or colonial area; and the other members of this leading group of capitalists were concerned indirectly or potentially. As a result of this taking place in every industrial country, even though in different degrees and at different rates, the foreign and colonial policy of the various national States came to reflect more and more definitely the interests of the leading capitalist group in each State, and the rivalry and conflict of interests between this group and rival groups of capitalists in other countries.

But just because of the monopolist character of industry and finance at this stage, the interests of each national group are no longer the simple trading interests of the earlier period. So long as trade is unrestricted it makes little difference to the trader whether his goods are

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sold in a country flying his own national flag or another, or from what national territory he secures the goods which he brings back for sale in his own country. But with the growth of monopoly and the piling up of capital in the hands of small national groups a new factor appears: the export of capital. The ownership and control of territory is in practice almost essential for the safe investment of capital in that territory, and for the security of interest or dividends on that capital. This is particularly true in colonial areas where there is no effective central government, and where rival national groups may secure other concessions which affect the earning capacity of investments already made. Abyssinia provides a good example of this latter point: the Jibuti railway, representing in the main French capital, could be rendered unprofitable, or at least much less profitable, if the Abyssinian Government accepted the offer of a corridor through British Somaliland to the sea, and gave British capital the opportunity of building a new railway and port works.

Apart from investments of capital, there is

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also the question of the sources of raw materials. When capitalism reaches the monopoly stage, it is possible for one national group which controls the sources of some particular raw material to hold other national groups to ransom ; the best example of this is Britain's control of a considerable proportion of the rubber produced in the world, and the hostility of the United States capitalists (who required rubber for industry) in connection with the high prices maintained by British suppliers in the years after the war. In any case, the "national" demand for raw material sources is not because the raw materials cannot be obtained, but because the price charged by another national group, which has the monopoly of existing supplies, is too high, or because one national group sees the opportunity of creating a "corner" in some raw material ; and above all, because the national group which puts forward the demand wants new fields of investment for its capital.

The demand for national expansion in the monopoly stage of capitalism is therefore, in essence, nothing but the demand of the most

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powerful group in a nation for new spheres of investment for capital and sources of cheap raw materials (which of course the capital of that group is to exploit). Alongside of these motives the demand for markets for manufactures is insignificant, if only because the markets exist and can be used even if the colonial country retains its independence. As for the demand for colonisation, for the export of settlers to carry on farming in a colonial country, this also only has reality in conjunction with the demand for spheres of investment. There are settlers, for example, in Kenya, but Kenya would never have been occupied for their sake.

The argument of surplus population is so frequently advanced to justify colonial expansion, and it is accepted by so many people, that it requires careful examination. From the standpoint of the individual who can find no work in his own country, or who wants to go out and "see the world," the opportunity to emigrate and find work in some foreign or colonial area seems welcome. He need not have the slightest tendencies to support imperialism. But, if he has sufficient means, he can become

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a settler in practically any area of the world, without regard to the flag that flies over it. The immigration from every part of Europe into the United States until its development began to slow down is the most obvious example of this type of "surplus population." There was no question in any of the European States of having to conquer the United States so that their "surplus population" could settle there.

What then is the difference between this solution of so-called surplus population and the solution sought by means of colonial expansion? The answer to this question will never be found in the needs or desires of the emigrants or would-be emigrants. It lies rather in the nature of the capitalist system of production, in the needs of capital itself.

It has already been shown that the drive for colonies in this stage of history comes from the need of the monopoly capitalists to find employment as capital for their accumulating profits. In industrially backward areas the first form of fixed capital is usually a railway. But apart from the profits made by the manufacturers of the rails and rolling stock, and by

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the contracting firm which gets the job of building it, and by the financiers who arrange the deal and float the loan to provide the capital (all of these groups are as a rule closely linked together), it is also necessary that the railway should pay when it is a going concern, in order to cover, out of each year's profits, at least the interest on the loan.

But this requires a considerable volume of traffic. And it is characteristic of a tribal or semi-feudal system of production that in the main the purpose of production is use and not trade. It is true that there is always a certain amount of trade going on, and that industrial products can usually find a market, though in limited quantities. But so long as the tribal or semi-feudal system of production remains in existence the volume of trade is small, because the people produce almost everything for themselves, and on the other hand have little surplus for exchange.

It therefore becomes an essential aim of the monopoly capitalists who are dealing with an industrially backward country, and are trying to make it a profitable field for new capital, to

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break down the existing system of production. And the most direct method of doing this is, by government action based on superior force, to take away the land from the people, either entirely or by driving them off good land to bad land or to small areas where they cannot possibly live in the way they lived before. This policy has been systematically applied, for example, in all the British East African colonies except in parts of Uganda. But the driving of African peoples from their traditional land does not in itself create trade; it is necessary then to begin capitalist production—production not for the use of the producer, but for the market. And it is at this point that the monopoly capitalist group which is directing the whole process remembers the “surplus population” which is alleged to exist in the mother country.

And so, by means of all kinds of bounties and propaganda (paid for, of course, not by the financial group concerned in the railway and other investments, but by the governments of the mother country and the colony out of taxes raised from the mass of the people), this “surplus population” is eventually persuaded

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to go out to the colony and begin to work farms on the best land seized from the Africans. They become settlers, and some of them succeed; but, as was said above, it was not at all for their sake that the colony was taken.

But the matter does not end there. By their own labour—even if the settlers are of the type who themselves work the land—little could be produced. Lord Delamere, for example, one of Britain's "surplus population" exported to East Africa, could hardly himself work the 100,000 acres he was reputed to hold. It is therefore necessary to find labour to work the land on a large scale. Here again the government obligingly steps in. The methods vary, of course; but for example in Kenya direct compulsion, exercised through the tribal chiefs or headmen who are paid servants of the Government, was in use in 1919 and 1920. A more general method, in use throughout British colonies in Africa, is the imposition of a hut or poll tax on the Africans. This compels them to seek work for Europeans in order to find the money to pay the tax; in 1924, for example, the tax varied from 12s. to 20s. per

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year in various parts of Kenya, and as the average wage of an African worker is 6s. to 12s. *per month*, this meant that he had to work for the white farmers for one or two months merely to find enough for his own tax, even if he had not also to find the tax for some other member of his family.<sup>1</sup>

In this way the drive of monopoly capital for new fields of investment leads remorselessly on, through the conquest of colonial territory and the establishment of a European government maintained by armed force, to the seizure of the land formerly used by the Africans as free men, the establishment of white settlers, and forcing the Africans back to work their own land for the white men. But it is evident that the settlers themselves are only acting as bailiffs for the monopoly capitalists, and to represent the whole drive for colonial territory as finding an outlet for "surplus population" is only one of the many forms of propaganda used by the ruling class to cover up their own plans of exploitation.

<sup>1</sup> The detailed methods of compelling the Africans to work for the white settlers in East Africa are given in *British Imperialism in East Africa*, issued by the Labour Research Department in 1926.

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And in fact the whole conception of surplus population must be challenged. The words are always used as if there is some definite limit fixed by Nature to the number of people who can live on a given area. But in fact there is no such limit. Everyone knows that the existence of unemployment has nothing whatever to do with any limit set by Nature. On the contrary, there would be more justification for saying that unemployment is due to Nature being too bountiful. Economic crises which ravage the capitalist world and cause unemployment on a large scale are bound up with over-production, and their solution is attempted by destroying stocks, restricting production, throwing land and factories out of use. It is therefore not a question of any natural limit to the population an area can support, but of the most unnatural limits to production and employment set by the capitalist system of production for profit. In so far as unemployment and therefore in a sense a "surplus population" exists in any country, it is due to the economic system; and—apart from the selfish aims of monopoly capital—this so-called surplus population could just as

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well be set to work on the idle land and factories in their own country as shipped abroad to become "settlers" in the country of other people. And finally, it is worth noting that Italy's justification of her attack on Abyssinia as carried out in the interests of her "surplus population" has as its background the fact that Mussolini has been trying desperately, by means of subsidies and propaganda, to raise the birth rate.

The strategic motive for the expansion of a country's colonial possessions is in a different category. Beyond question, this is a real motive, and has often played its part in the seizure of a particular piece of territory. It was always present to some extent in the case of British policy in North-East Africa; from Suez to Egypt, from Egypt to the Sudan, from Sudan to Abyssinia; and again, from Suez to British Somaliland and again to Abyssinia. But it is obvious that the strategic motive is always subordinate to the economic motives already mentioned; the economic interests must first exist before it is necessary to think of their defence, and the strategic motive itself is

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usually directed towards the extension and not merely the defence of territory.

The conclusions reached so far are that the real driving force in a State's demand for expansion is the desire of a small and extremely rich group to find new spheres of investment and sources of cheap raw materials. It is this desire which leads not only to wars of conquest of industrially backward countries, but also to wars between the States whose rich groups are in competition for new colonial territories. And although from time to time the rival groups may temporarily compose their differences and act in concert, in the long run the rivalry of interests is bound to assert itself again, and then the respective States of these rival groups hurriedly increase their armaments and prepare for war.

But if the desire of the monopoly capitalist (industrial and financial) groups in each industrial country is the driving force in the whole process of colonial expansion and wars of rivalry, is this desire itself merely the product of diseased minds—of megalomania, war mentality, or just pure devilment? If it is true that

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the personal vanity and megalomania of a Kaiser, a Mussolini or a Hitler play their part in the methods of a particular State at certain periods, the drive to colonial expansion and war in the present stage of history is too universal to be explained by such factors. The root cause must be looked for in the economic system which is common to all advanced industrial countries.

Why do the monopoly capitalist groups in each advanced industrial country want to find spheres of investment and sources of raw materials abroad? Why do they not invest their accumulated profits in the home country? Why do they want, for example, to get tin from Malaya rather than from Cornwall? Many well-meaning writers point to the enormous volume of constructional work required, from a social standpoint, in Britain itself, and are horrified to find that, in spite of enormous resources lying idle, little is done (for example in the depressed areas) although huge sums are spent in developing colonial areas and in preparations for war. But once again, the reason is to be found not in the heartlessness

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of individuals but in the character of the economic system within which the monopolist groups are working.

Without attempting a detailed analysis of this economic system, it is possible to concentrate attention on one feature which is obvious to everyone. Production is carried on for profit, and the greater the concentration of industry and finance in the control of a small group, the greater the amount of profit which each year is not consumed in personal expenditure but is accumulated as new capital. But the money profits made each year by the very rich monopolists are not capital in the strict sense until they are invested—until they are employed in new production on which new profits can be made. Therefore the economic system is itself constantly, and at an increasing rate, creating the necessity for new investments.

In the early stages of a country's industrial development the necessity for new investments (of freshly accumulated profits) is met in the home country: the products of machine industry cut out the products of handicraft industry,

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modern transport methods cut out the old methods, and in turn a huge machine-building industry develops, making the machinery and equipment for new industrial production. But when the cheaper products of machine industry have won the whole home market, and profits still continue to be accumulated, these profits cannot find employment as capital unless the markets are extended. This, without going into technicalities, is the basis of the drive for foreign and colonial trade.

But the amassing of profits continues, and even at an increasing rate because of the higher profits on goods sold in technically backward countries. A stage is reached when these new profits amassed each year can no longer be invested as new capital at home; and at the same time the previous investment in the machine-building and heavy industry ceases to show a profit, because the home possibilities of using new capital goods have been exhausted. Finance therefore must look abroad, and chiefly to undeveloped colonial areas, for its spheres of investment; and at the same time heavy industry must look abroad for its markets

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for capital goods. This is the stage of imperialism, and the drive towards colonial expansion and war comes directly out of the present economic system of profit-making and accumulation of profit as new capital. The individuals who from time to time appear as the makers of colonial or inter-capitalist wars are merely the instruments through which the laws of the economic system work. A Chamberlain, Grey, Kaiser, Hitler or Mussolini, whatever their other personal attributes, are working within these laws for the interests of the particular national group of monopoly capitalists whom they represent.

It follows that all the various moral or "patriotic" justifications for colonial expansion and wars of rivalry between industrially-advanced States—that is, between the monopoly-capitalist groups identified with these States—are simply window-dressing. As Chapter I showed, this has been fairly obvious to everyone who followed the events leading up to the Italo-Abyssinian war. But it is necessary also to remember that Chapter II showed precisely the same drive on the part of British and

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French monopolists to secure for themselves the whole or a share of the sphere of investment which Abyssinia can provide. The British and French monopoly capitalist groups are no more moral, no more concerned with international justice, no more unselfish than the Italian monopoly capitalist group. Not only past history, but the Committee of Five's report showed this beyond question: the British and French monopolist groups, whose spokesmen are the National Government and the Laval Government, are more than ready to sacrifice Abyssinia's territorial and political integrity provided they come in on the ground floor.

Later chapters will discuss in greater detail the question of how and why the League of Nations, dominated by imperialist States of the type described above, can yet play a certain part in attempting to prevent or stop a war of naked aggression for the purpose of colonial expansion. Here it is only necessary to say that this is possible first and foremost, because of the magnificent stand made by Abyssinia, which has steadfastly refused absorption or partition; and secondly, because of the

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conflicting interests of the monopoly capitalist groups in other States, not only over Abyssinia but over the whole European and world situation. The next chapter, on Imperialism and Fascism, begins to develop this point.

## IV

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THE CONCENTRATION of great masses of capital in the hands of comparatively small groups in each country, as the last chapter showed, is of very great importance in the foreign relations and colonial policy of the industrially-advanced countries. But it also has very great significance for the internal situation in these countries. The concentration of capital goes side by side with the introduction of bigger productive units and the greater use of machinery and mechanised methods in production. This is partly because the competition for markets acts as a spur to the industrial capitalists in each country in their efforts to lower the cost of production, so that they can lower their prices in the markets of the world. But there is also another reason which comes into play more and more when the huge profits made by monopoly capital are looking

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for some investment, for some place where they can be used as new capital that will bring in new dividends. If the new profits are invested in new factories to produce more goods, it may be quite impossible to sell these goods in view of the fact that the markets are already overstocked. But if the profits are invested in *new machinery* which saves labour and therefore reduces the cost of production, the profit made at first even on the same quantity of goods as before will be considerably larger, and this larger profit will provide a dividend not only on the old capital, but on the old plus the new capital. Therefore the greater the concentration of capital, the greater the profits seeking investment and the greater the drive to "rationalisation" as well as to colonial expansion. And rationalisation means not only the use of labour-saving machinery, but also the carrying out of production and transport operations with fewer men through speeding up the work done by each man, so that some of them can be "saved," as the employer sees it, or, looked at from the workers' standpoint, thrown on the scrap-heap.

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Therefore the monopoly stage of capitalism, which in its earlier processes brings the workers together in larger numbers in bigger factories, in its later processes begins to drive the workers out of the factories. In this period unemployment reaches heights unknown at earlier periods, and in spite of fluctuations from year to year, remains on a very high level. At the same time the workers still in employment are being constantly speeded up, and the social services are being reduced because of the heavy drain on the State budget. The workers' discontent grows, whether they are employed or unemployed, and they come more and more into conflict with the employing and ruling class. The monopoly capitalists in each country have to conduct a fight on three fronts: against rival monopoly capitalists in other countries, against the colonial peoples, and against the working class in their own country. And every year they are making new profits which have to be invested, and therefore every year the struggle for new spheres of investment deepens the conflict with their rival national groups, with the colonial peoples, and with their own workers.

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Moreover, the position<sup>1</sup> of the ruling class in each country is made even more difficult by the economic crises which are inseparable from the capitalist system of production. This is not the place to show the underlying causes of these crises<sup>1</sup>; but everyone knows that they have occurred at more or less frequent intervals ever since industrial capitalism developed. Everyone knows also that since the war there have been two world-wide economic crises—the first lasting from the end of 1920 to 1923, with a very gradual improvement lasting until 1929, and the second beginning in the second half of 1929 and continuing with greater or less intensity in different countries until the present day. These crises, coming on top of the chronic large-scale unemployment, difficulty in finding investment for capital, and the constant under-employment of existing capital, all of which are characteristic features of the advanced stage of monopoly capitalism, had very considerable results in sharpening all the conflicts referred

<sup>1</sup> The reader who is interested in this subject should read my *Capitalism, Communism and the Transition*.

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to above, and in particular the conflict between the monopoly capitalists and the workers in industrial countries.

It was out of this conflict that Fascism was born in a number of European countries, the most important of which are Italy and Germany. But it was also out of this conflict that in such countries as Britain, which still retained democratic forms of Government, the apparatus of government became more and more centralised. For example, in the administration of relief, first the Boards of Guardians were abolished, then the Public Assistance Committees which replaced them met the same fate, and finally relief administration has been put into the hands of an almost completely centralised apparatus under the Unemployment Assistance Board. Such legislation as the Emergency Powers Act and the Trade Disputes Act—both directed against large strikes—is also evidence of the same deepening conflict. Similar illustrations could be given from France and the United States among other countries where democratic forms are still maintained to a considerable extent.

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What is the basis for this almost universal limiting of democratic forms and liberties in the recent period, in marked contrast to the "broadening down" which seemed so definite and safe a process in every country in the years before the war? The answer is to be found in those same factors which have been shown to be responsible for the drive to colonial expansion and war.

The monopoly capitalist groups which controlled the State machine, spent hundreds of millions of pounds of State funds on armaments and war preparations, and sent ships and men to conquer for them new fields of investment in colonial areas, could not have maintained their control if they had not succeeded in persuading considerable sections of the workers that they too stood to benefit from an imperialist policy. Imperialist propaganda of course was necessary for this, especially the propaganda (in the earlier stages based on fact) that colonial expansion meant more work and greater prosperity for at least a section of the workers in the mother country. But in addition to propaganda, it was also necessary for the

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monopoly capitalists to give some sections of the workers—the most influential sections—some more tangible benefits to link them with the interests of the ruling class. The relatively high profits derived from colonial trade made it possible to give certain groups of the workers—in Britain, particularly the skilled textile workers and engineering workers—much better conditions than those of the rest of the working class. In the early period of monopoly capitalism it was therefore possible for the ruling class to win over considerable sections of the working class, and in particular of the working-class leaders, for the support of a nationalist, imperialist policy. In this period the extension of democratic forms of government, by fostering the feeling that the working class was making its own decisions and determining national policy, was not at all dangerous to the ruling class. This was all the more so because the democratic forms provided excellent opportunities for winning over the working-class leaders, who began to feel “national” responsibilities and, as the attitude of the overwhelming majority in 1914 showed in every country,

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had by then completely identified themselves with the interests of their own monopoly capitalists.

But in the course of the war large groups of workers in every country became disillusioned. In Russia the power not only of the Tsarist bureaucracy but also of the whole landlord and capitalist class was overthrown in 1917, and a workers' government was established to put an end to capitalism and introduce socialism. In Germany the Kaiser's bureaucracy was overthrown in 1918; but in the critical months that followed the same labour leaders who had identified themselves with the German ruling class of 1914—men who viewed their interests as bound up with the maintenance of the capitalist system—prevented the completion of the revolution, and led the workers back into a parliamentary form of government and the old capitalist system of production for profit.

Then followed a period of parliamentary democracy in which the Social Democratic leaders acted as brokers for the monopoly capitalists of Germany, making concessions to the workers until the latter's most urgent

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demands had been satisfied or at least forgotten. But the difficulties of the German monopoly capitalists, caused partly by the loss of Alsace-Lorraine and the German colonies, and partly by Reparations payments and the economic crises which affected the whole world, made them unable to maintain the concessions given to the working class in the most dangerous period. The material basis on which parliamentary democracy and the illusion of the identical interests of the two classes had been founded now began to crumble away. From the beginning of the 1929 crisis it became increasingly difficult for the ruling class to maintain its supremacy by the old methods. It began to organise seriously a force which it had already considered in the difficult period of 1923 and 1924, but which had been pushed into the background during the economic revival from 1925 to 1929, when it was possible still to operate through the Social Democrats and concessions. Now, after 1929, the pressure of profits seeking investment, the hemming in of Germany from colonial expansion and therefore the intenser drive that

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was necessary against the German workers, all made it necessary to do away with the democratic forms, useful only in a period of concessions, and substitute for them in a naked form the direct rule of the monopoly capitalists.

Accordingly, the ruling class began serious preparations. It was far too dangerous for it to attempt the change of method without a considerable amount of propaganda for the change. Therefore Hitler and his "National Socialists" began to be heavily subsidised in order to win large sections of workers and of the middle class away from the Social Democrats. This was made all the easier by the fact that, owing to the economic crisis, the Social Democrats were quite unable to maintain for the workers the concessions gained in previous years. Not only wages, but all social services began to be drastically cut down. The Nazi campaigners made skilful use of this, and also of the nationalist, imperialist propaganda which expresses in every country the most direct interests of the monopoly capitalists. As a result, Nazi influence grew rapidly. In the 1928 elections the Nazi vote was 800,000; in the elections of

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September 1930 they polled over six million votes, and in the elections of July 1932, 13,732,000. During this period too the armed force of the Nazis was developed.

In the second half of 1932, however, the tide began to turn: the preliminary steps taken by the ruling class—in particular the forcible ejection of the Social Democratic Government of Prussia in July 1932—had begun to disillusion the workers, and the Communist Party's appeal for unity against Fascism was having considerable effect. In the November 1932 election the Nazi vote fell by two million, to 11,729,000, against a combined Socialist and Communist vote of 13,241,000. Had this process been allowed to go on, the monopoly capitalists would not have been able to use the Nazis successfully; and therefore in January 1933 Hitler was summoned to take over the government.

During the preceding years of propaganda Hitler and his assistants had sought to win the support of all sections of the German people by a most varied campaign, promising the most contradictory things to each group. His main

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support, however, came from two groups: the unemployed workers, who were disillusioned with the inactivity of the Social Democratic governments, and the lower middle class, which was finding its existence more and more difficult with the growth of centralised monopolies and the general economic situation. In some quarters the Nazi Government was at first thought to represent the interests of the lower middle class, owing to the latter's wide support of Hitler. Events however proved that the interests which Hitler represented were in fact the interests of the men who had called him to power: the richest groups of Germany's monopoly capitalists—the Thyssens and the Krupps. It is true that to some extent Hitler has continued to appeal to the lower middle class—this is the purpose of his repeated campaigns against the Jews—but the main lines of his activities, the home and foreign policy of his Government, have nothing to do with the middle class; they are simply and solely directed to furthering the interests of the richest monopoly capitalists.

What were the main aims of the German

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ruling class in entrusting the government to Hitler and his armed forces? History has shown clearly enough: to substitute coercion of the most drastic kind for concessions which were no longer possible. Accordingly, the Reichstag was destroyed, and all working-class and liberal organisations attacked; the Social Democratic Party was practically swept away, the trade unions and co-operatives were smashed, and only the Communist Party was able to continue its work in spite of the most brutal repression. All democratic forms of government were abolished and replaced by a completely centralised apparatus. The Press was closed down or brought under strict control. By all these measures the rising revolutionary tide was checked.

But this was only the first aim. In the conditions then existing in Germany the relief to the monopoly capitalists from breaking the power of the working-class movement could only be temporary. Therefore from the very first the Nazi Government began to hurry forward the re-arming of Germany, and to seek allies in preparation for a new expansionist drive—a

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drive for new spheres of investment for the profits which the monopoly capitalists were now able to make on a larger scale. But because of the abolition of democratic forms and the smashing of the organised Social Democratic, Trade Union, and Co-operative movements, and the considerable restriction of the activity of the Communist Party (which the Nazis were unable to destroy), it was possible for the German monopoly capitalists to proceed much more openly and quickly than they could have done under the former democratic system of government. And at the same time, the monopoly capitalists no longer found it necessary to maintain an alliance with the smaller capitalists against the workers. The interests of these smaller capitalists could now be ignored; only those of the richest, most brutally rapacious capitalists counted in Nazi Germany. The Hitler Government, and the Nazi organisation, is merely the instrument for the open dictatorship of this group. And because it is the dictatorship of the most brutal, most rapacious group of monopoly capitalists in the country, every Fascist government is

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openly and blatantly a government of war, a government that from the start aims at riding roughshod over every form of international agreement and over every people—starting with its own.

The driving force behind a Fascist government's war preparations and expansionist aims is the same as the driving force behind the similar policy of every capitalist government: the pressure of monopoly capital to find new outlets for its accumulated profits. There is, however, a very important difference. In the countries where democratic forms of government still exist, where strong working-class organisations are still active, it is necessary for the monopoly capitalist group to take into account the interests of the lesser capitalists and, to some extent at least, "public opinion," particularly the standpoint of the organised working class. Of course "public opinion" can be influenced and even manufactured by the ruling group through its control of the major part of the Press, the wireless, and other means of propaganda. But it cannot be influenced and steam-rollered to the same extent as in a

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Fascist country, where every other organisation, especially of the working class, is virtually silenced. In the democratic countries, therefore, it is still necessary for the ruling class to act warily, to win the support or neutrality of the working class by a slower, more disguised policy than is necessary in Fascist countries. And to the extent that the monopoly capitalists in the Fascist countries are unrestrained, their expansionist policy is more aggressive in the international field, and the policy of the democratic countries—in relation to that of the Fascist countries—is more conservative, more defensive, and to that extent acts as a barrier to the openly aggressive policy of the Fascists. It is particularly necessary to realise this difference in the position of the monopoly capitalist groups in the Fascist as compared with the democratic countries. The international history of the last few years—especially since the Hitler régime was set up in Germany in 1933—is only comprehensible if this difference is taken into account. And, as a later chapter shows, the failure to understand and take account of this factor has led certain

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sections of the British Labour Movement into a very strange position in relation to the Italian attack on Abyssinia.

The rise and nature of Fascism in Germany has been dealt with first because the change is more recent than the similar change in Italy. The main German events are fresh in everyone's mind, and the causes and results of these events are more obvious and more widely understood than the causes and results of the similar events in Italy ten years earlier. But in fact the general background of Fascism in Italy was very much the same as in Germany. Italy was one of the victors in the war; but in the years following the war the conflict between the working class and the monopoly capitalists reached very great intensity. Partly owing to Italy's late entry into the war, and to the divisions in the ruling class itself as to which side to take, the Italian Socialist Party did not line itself up with its own monopoly capitalists as the Socialist and Labour parties did in other belligerent countries in 1914 (except, of course, in Russia, where the Bolsheviks—the majority section of the Russian Social Democratic

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Labour Party—opposed the war from the start and worked to end it by revolution). Therefore at the end of the war the Italian Socialists as an organised party—there were many individual “patriots,” of course—stood in opposition to the ruling class, and the universal discontent among the workers, the agricultural population and the demobilised soldiers could not be allayed by minor concessions. And Italian capitalism itself was not in a position to give substantial concessions. There was therefore a rising revolutionary wave during 1919 and 1920; but the actual leaders of the movement, in spite of their attitude on the war question, had been trained before the war in an attitude of compromise with the ruling class, and were able to hold back the revolution. In September 1920, following a lock-out by the employers, important factories in Northern Italy were occupied by the workers. The Government was powerless; the army could not be trusted against the workers. Everyone regarded the seizure of the factories as the first step in the revolution; but the Socialist and Trade Union leaders persuaded the workers to

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surrender the factories again, and a feeling of dejection spread through the working class. Finally, the world economic crisis in its development during 1921 and 1922 seriously affected economic conditions in Italy, and led to a weakening of the revolutionary movement; at the same time the ruling class armed and strengthened the Fascist organisation. At the end of 1922 Mussolini and his Fascists were summoned to take over control of the State machine, and to carry out by force the smashing of the workers' organisations and of all democratic institutions. As in Germany, there was no Fascist "revolution": Mussolini "marched" on Rome by rail, in a sleeping car. Mussolini, like Hitler, was called to office by the ruling class, which had already financed and protected the building up of the Fascist organisation. Mussolini, like Hitler, was charged with the first duty of destroying the working-class parties, trade unions and co-operatives, and suppressing all liberal tendencies which represented opposition in any form to the needs of the monopoly capitalists. Mussolini's Fascists did their work with the same bestial

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brutality as, ten years later, Hitler's Nazis did theirs.

But the suppression of the working-class movement was only their first task; their second was the strengthening of the military apparatus and the development of an active policy of expansion. At the same time, however, although from the first jingo patriotism was in the ascendant in all official propaganda, conditions were not easy. Italy was not nearly so advanced industrially as Germany. Attempts to extend Italian influence in South-Eastern Europe met with sharp opposition from France. It was necessary to make long preparations, and to proceed cautiously. At the same time, the general economic situation in the world began to improve after 1923, and the position within Italy grew easier; industries, especially engineering and chemical, were being extended in Italy, and the need to find spheres of investment outside Italy was not so urgent.

With the turn of the economic tide from 1929, however, the situation within Italy rapidly became worse. It is not an accident that Italian troops occupied the Walwal area in Abyssinia

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in 1929 and 1930, or that Italy's war industries began from then to work at top speed. But caution was still necessary: in some way the British and French interests had to be bought off, or at any rate divided. At first attempts were made to effect a reconciliation with British monopoly capitalism, which was then feeling the danger of French expansion. This aim had almost been secured when in 1933 the advent of Hitler to power in Germany created a new difficulty for Italy—the menace of a German absorption of Austria. The danger grew extremely serious in 1934, but, as shown in Chapter II, it was averted, and a completely new alignment was reached by an agreement with France against German aggression in Austria. This was rendered easier by the British National Government's encouragement of Germany's re-arming. Italian monopoly capitalism had succeeded in dividing France from Britain, and the way was now clear, after long manoeuvres and preparations, for the attack on Abyssinia.

But unfortunately for the calculations of Italy's rulers, the crisis which had given the

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extra urge for colonial expansion and brought Fascism to the saddle in Germany had also struck every other capitalist country, leaving a trail of havoc in its wake. Each country had passed through severe economic difficulties, and the ruling class of each country was fighting desperately both against its own workers and against its rivals in other countries. The fight for existence had resulted in the setting up of all kinds of trade barriers, currency restrictions and other methods of gaining advantage over rivals; in every direction international relations were severely strained, and every country was pushing forward its preparations for war. The Soviet Union had not only survived: it was now one of the strongest forces in the world, and was playing an important part in international relations. Some of the smaller States were beginning to fear for their existence. The peoples in many colonial areas were already bordering on revolt, and in China the successful development of Chinese Soviet areas was threatening imperialist expansion both directly and indirectly as an example to other colonial peoples.

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In these circumstances the Italian attack on Abyssinia could not be a matter affecting only those two countries. Nor could it even be restricted to a question in which only France and Britain were also concerned. It became necessarily an issue which shifted violently the existing relations between every State and every group of States; and on the other hand, less obviously perhaps but no less surely, it affected the relations between the ruling class in every country and its own workers, and between the imperialist States and the colonial peoples. And because of this, the League of Nations, for the first time in its history, began to take serious action, and the working class throughout the world was also roused to action on a wider scale than had ever before seemed possible. The Italian ruling class found that it had to deal, not only with the Abyssinians, not only with its own people, but with almost the whole world.

## V

### THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

THE COVENANT of the League of Nations forms Part I, Articles 1-26, of the Versailles Peace Treaty ; it was signed in June 1919. Its formation, its composition and its activities during the following years revealed it clearly as the machinery set up by the victorious Powers—Britain, France, Italy and Japan—to safeguard the Versailles Treaty and to carry their victory to its logical conclusion. On the Council of the League, which is in effect its Executive Committee, the representatives of the States mentioned had permanent seats ; six other members were also elected annually by the League Assembly, or full meeting, which was dominated by representatives of States economically dependent on the great Powers. Germany, Austria and Hungary were excluded from membership ; the United States refused to join. It was therefore from the

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first an instrument of Britain, France, Italy and Japan, and was dominated by the first two.

Apart from setting up the Reparations machinery, through which the monopoly capitalists in the Allied countries hoped to maintain their stranglehold on their German rivals, the League of Nations did other loyal service to the Allied financiers by organising guaranteed loans to the States whose economic position had been rendered impossible by the Versailles treaty. In this way, for example, a loan of £32,000,000 for Austria was issued in 1923, of which £14,000,000 was raised in Britain, on terms which were extremely disadvantageous for Austria, but extremely beneficial to the financiers who handled it; and in 1924 there was a similar loan of over £14,000,000 for Hungary, of which the British share was nearly £8,000,000.

The general work of the League, however, was of even greater importance for the ruling groups than these direct financial deals. The war ended with the Russian revolution firmly established and a revolution in Germany which,

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though limited, might at any moment change its character; and during 1919 and 1920 serious conflicts developed between the ruling class and the workers in almost every European country. The work of the ruling groups in the Allied countries was therefore to suppress the revolutionary movements and make the world safe for capital. And the League of Nations provided very useful machinery for the general alliance of "civilisation" against "Bolsh-evism." The revolutionary government in Hungary was overthrown, and timely assistance given to the German capitalists to deal with the revolutionary movement there. It is true that the attempts to overthrow the Russian revolutionary government were unsuccessful; but a "cordon sanitaire" was established to the west of Soviet Russia by bolstering up the anti-revolutionary governments of the Border States. For many years the League of Nations devoted a great part of its activities to the fight against Soviet Russia, until difficulties which developed between the capitalist States themselves weakened the united front of "civilisation" and brought

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about far more complicated international groupings.

Before dealing with the main alleged aim of the League—the prevention of war—it is necessary to touch on the system of mandates, because of the various proposals for the League supervision of Abyssinia. The general political situation at the end of the war, and the humanitarian aims which had been proclaimed by President Wilson and the Allies, made it somewhat inconvenient to annex Germany's colonial possessions in the simple, direct way sanctioned by custom. Therefore the blessing of the newly-founded League of Nations was invoked to sanctify the possession by the victorious Powers of the German colonies and Turkish territories which they had already seized. By Article 22 of the League Covenant: the "well-being and development" of the colonial peoples "not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world" was declared to be "a sacred trust of civilisation." Accordingly each ex-German colony and ex-Turkish area was to be handed over to an "advanced" State:

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“ . . . the tutelage of such peoples should be entrusted to advanced nations who, by reason of their resources, their experience or their geographical position can best undertake this responsibility . . . ”

And, of course, it was obvious that the victorious Powers had both the resources and the experience as tutors. The choice of the League—that is, of the victorious Powers—happily coincided with already established facts. Britain, then financially dominant, secured the tutelage of the whole or part of German East Africa, Togoland, Cameroon, Palestine and Mesopotamia; British Dominions gained Nauru, Samoa, German islands in the South Pacific, and German South-West Africa. France secured parts of Togoland and Cameroon, and Syria. Belgium received a part of German East Africa, and Japan Kiauchow and German islands in the North Pacific. Italy received nothing but frontier adjustments; in fact, the internal position in Italy made it impossible for the Italian Government to press for the honouring of the promises made

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to Italy in return for entering the war on the side of the Allies.

The administration of the mandated territories has presented many difficult problems, especially owing to the occasional opposition of the inhabitants to the sacred trust so obligingly undertaken by the Powers. In actual fact the administration of a mandated territory has not differed in any essential respect from that of the other colonial territories held by an imperialist Power without the formality of a mandate—except perhaps in the frequency of the revolts and the severity with which these revolts have been suppressed. The ruthless military action, aerial bombing, judicial and other repression undertaken in Mesopotamia and Palestine by the British Government has as its counterpart the bombardment of Damascus and the campaign against the Druses conducted by the French Government in Syria. In no case was there any condemnation or attempt at interference by the League. The wholesale massacre by aeroplane bombing of the Bondelzwarts, a Hottentot race in ex-German South-West Africa administered under

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mandate by the South African Government, was raised in the League Assembly in 1923 ; the alleged reason for the bombing was that the Bondelzwarts " could not or would not pay a tax on their dogs." But the League asked for a report from the Smuts Government, and did no more. Numerous other instances could be quoted to show that the protection afforded by the League in connection with the mandated territories is not to the unfortunate inhabitants " who are not yet able to stand by themselves in the strenuous conditions of the modern world," but to the financial interests who are carrying out the exploitation of the colonial peoples on a more extensive scale and by more ruthless methods than would have been safe but for the " moral " backing of the League.

It is important that this should be remembered not only because, in the present attack by Italy on Abyssinia, the " bombing of defenceless civilians " is being condemned by statesmen whose Governments have used such methods freely enough for the collection of taxes. Its more fundamental importance is that, in one form or another, it is being

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suggested that a solution of the Abyssinian question might be found along the lines of a League mandate; the report of the Committee of Five comes close to this, and any attempt made by the ruling groups of Britain, France and Italy to do a deal by partitioning Abyssinia between them is almost certain to be covered up in the form of mandates or a joint mandate from the League.

It is, however, in the sphere of international relations and the prevention of war that the original character of the League of Nations comes out most clearly. It is not necessary to go through the whole history of the last sixteen years: it can be summed up by saying that in every international dispute in which one of the leading Powers was concerned directly or indirectly, no action was taken by the League. The chief League Powers were, of course, solidly behind Poland's invasion of Russia in 1920—this was merely an incident in their general campaign against Soviet Russia. The whole series of attacks by Japan on China, particularly at Shanghai and in Manchuria, passed almost unnoticed by the League, except

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when the importunity of the victim forced the appointment of a commission whose report had not the slightest influence on the course of events. In the Bolivia-Paraguay war, in which both British and United States interests were at stake, the League did nothing for two years, until the exhaustion on both sides was creating a dangerous revolutionary situation. In other cases, where the dispute was not so closely bound up with the interests of the leading Powers, or where its development threatened their interests, a certain amount of mediation and conciliation has been undertaken through the machinery of the League. An example of this was the Greek invasion of Bulgaria in 1925, following on a frontier incident: the League Council was immediately summoned and ordered the Greeks to withdraw their troops, and finally the affair was settled through a commission.

Apart from the immediate acts of war, the history of the League's activities on what is called Disarmament shows clearly enough that the League altered nothing in the existing relations between States. Article 8 of the

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League Covenant recognised that "the maintenance of peace requires the reduction of national armaments." In the situation following the war the Powers felt no immediate need for additional armaments; arms had done their work for the time being, except to maintain the gains of war, and this purpose was largely achieved by the disarmament of Germany under the Versailles Treaty. The economic crisis of 1921 to 1923 however began to threaten a breach in the new division of the world achieved by the Treaty. Japanese, American, French and British interests began to conflict. Already Britain was beginning to fear the growing influence of France in Europe. In 1924 Britain, under the first Labour Government, began to build additional cruisers, and the other Powers were not slow to follow. The Washington Treaty, limiting the total tonnage and size of units in the fleets of the United States, Japan, and Britain, had been signed in 1922. But armaments were steadily increasing in every country, including Germany; and a new impetus was given by the second large economic crisis which began in 1929.

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By then the alignment of the imperialist groups based on the Versailles Treaty had considerably changed. From being the open instrument for the consolidation of the Anglo-French victory, the League was becoming the field where not only the British and French Governments, but also the governments of other capitalist States, were manoeuvring for support from each other. Germany, Austria, and many other States were now members. These States had been brought in from time to time by one or other of the Powers to increase its own influence, as in the case of Abyssinia in 1923, then supported by France and Italy against British opposition. Britain had a long struggle with France to bring in Germany. The question of inviting the Soviet Union to take part in the Disarmament Conference was an issue fought for by Italy and Germany against France in the League Council in January 1931. The Disarmament Conference dragged on for years, achieving nothing for the very good reason that the big Powers were merely using it as a cover for their increasing armaments and active preparations for war.

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Germany concentrated on the demand for equality, that is, to be allowed to re-arm. The Soviet Union proposed a complete and general disarmament. And the other Powers held up any decision, meanwhile conducting continuous separate negotiations among themselves, while they increased their military, naval and air forces.

In this period the hostility of the British ruling class to the Soviet Union led to the encouragement by Britain of Japanese expansion in Manchuria, threatening the Far East of Siberia; and also to continuous support for the Border States on the west of the Soviet Union, and attempts to draw in Germany into an alliance against the Soviet Union. The British encouragement of Germany's claim to rearm became clear during those years, tending to deepen the estrangement between Britain and France.

And then in 1933 the Hitler Government was installed in Germany, strengthening tenfold the expansionist drive of the German ruling class and threatening war. The British ruling class soon allied itself more openly with the

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Germans, partly as a counter-weight to the influence of France and partly in order to secure an alliance which would threaten the Soviet Union from the West together with the Japanese threat from the East.

As early as 1932 the British National Government was issuing licences for the export of aero-engines to Germany—for "civilian flying" of course. In October 1933 Fascist Germany withdrew from the Disarmament Conference, as a protest against not being permitted to rearm, and gave notice of resignation from the League of Nations. By March 1934 Britain and Italy were advocating German rearmament (already partially accomplished in fact), as against French opposition. In April 1934, at the annual meeting of Vickers Ltd., the chairman admitted that Vickers had been advertising in the German Press; he would give no information on the question of whether arms were being supplied to Germany, but remarked that nothing was being done without the knowledge of the British Government. After the attempted German Fascist coup in Vienna in August 1934, Italy became opposed to

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Germany, leaving Britain to support German claims to rearmament all through 1934. In March 1935 Germany announced the formation of an Air Force (forbidden by the Versailles Treaty) and a few days later introduced conscription. At the end of March came Sir John Simon's visit to Berlin; in June the Anglo-German Naval Agreement was signed. Thus, with British assistance, the Versailles balance of forces was broken down, and Fascist Germany was placed in a position to satisfy the expansionist aims of its rulers.

In the whole of this period the League of Nations played no serious part in international relations. It had played a certain part in Europe as the instrument not of justice, but of the Allied Powers, in the early years after the war. Changing conditions broke through the Versailles Treaty in every direction; forces other than Britain and France gathered strength; Japan and then Germany left the League as a gesture of independence. On the other hand, precisely because the League could no longer serve merely as the instrument of one group, the Soviet Union accepted the

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invitation of 34 States to join it, and became a member in September 1934.

In the following months, side by side with Italy's urgent preparations for war, groupings and counter-groupings of the Powers were formed and dissolved, innumerable conferences were held, and every State rapidly increased its armaments. Apart from the Italian adventure—but with great influence on its later stages—two diplomatic events were of special significance. One was the signing of the Franco-Soviet Pact of Mutual Assistance in May, 1935, which as it were crystallised the Soviet Union's increasing influence and its determination to take every step that might check the Fascist drive to war. The second was the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of June 1935, which crystallised the continuous support given by Britain to Fascist Germany in re-arming, against the terms of the Versailles Treaty—against France as well as against the Soviet Union.

This was the general background of Mussolini's war on Abyssinia, and it was the general realignment of forces in the world that changed

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the part that could be played by the League of Nations and made it possible for it to act. The general course of events prior to the actual invasion of Abyssinia has been described in earlier chapters. Undoubtedly the Italian Government considered that it could depend on neutrality, and even support, from France, and that the attitude of France would make it impossible for Britain to take any serious action. It is clear that all through the early months of 1935 the French Government (and for many months also the British) was defending Italy's claims for delaying any action by the League; up to the last moment France's attitude was uncertain, and even after the League decision to apply sanctions France was a retarding influence. But what made the French Government go even as far as it did?

Certainly the Covenant of the League of Nations had nothing to do with it: Laval's conscience is not likely to have been more active in October than it was in January, when he agreed to give Italy a free hand. Undoubtedly the fear of German aggression, which drove France to make the agreement with

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Italy in January, and to sign the Franco-Soviet Pact of Mutual Assistance in May, was increased by the Anglo-German Naval Treaty of June. To give Italian Fascism a free hand after that was clearly to encourage German Fascism to strike out elsewhere, whereas the checking of Italian Fascism was also a moral victory against German Fascist plans of expansion. Moreover, as between Britain and Italy, the French Government had no illusions as to which was the most formidable ally against Germany. Britain might even be willing to bribe France away from Italy by promising support against a German attack; in any case, if the League of Nations could intervene against Italian aggression in Abyssinia, it might also serve as an additional guarantee against a German attack on France. Therefore in the long run, and influenced to a considerable extent by the "People's Front" campaign in France, Laval decided to look to Britain rather than Italy, and therefore to support League action—always, however, keeping in close touch with Italy. The attitude of the Soviet Government, which from the first

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declared for the rigid enforcement of the Covenant, undoubtedly played its part in strengthening public opinion and gave the lead to the attitude of some of the smaller States, such as Turkey, whose sympathy with Abyssinia was deeply rooted in their past experience of imperialist penetration and partition; and besides, Turkey had special fears of Italian aggression.

Within a few days of the invasion of Abyssinia, the League had made the necessary formal declaration that Italy was the aggressor, and had begun the application of sanctions. How far such sanctions could be effective, and in what period, is a technical question on which experts seemed divided. But the fact remains that for the first time the League acted in a dispute in which one of the larger Powers was concerned. Does this mean that it had changed its fundamental character, that it was no longer the instrument of imperialist interests? Yes, and no.

Yes, because it is no longer *merely* the instrument of a few capitalist Powers whose supremacy is unchallenged. The presence of the Soviet

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Union, and the strength of the Soviet Union makes a tremendous difference; first, because the desire of the Soviet Union for peace corresponds with the desire of one of the greatest powers, France, to check German aggression, and secondly because the interests of the smaller States also lie in peace and the checking of imperialist aggression. The Soviet Union therefore became the rallying point of those countries which wish to do everything possible to prevent war. Moreover, it is not without significance that the most aggressive States are outside the League, or, as in Italy's case, opposing the League, thus to some extent leaving the League as a whole in the position of a conservative *bloc*, hostile to the more pressing expansionist aims of the Fascist States.

The question of the attitude of the British Government is discussed in more detail in another chapter. But its presence in the League, its support of German rearmament, its repeated attempts to make a deal with Italy by partitioning Abyssinia—even its repeated statements after the war began that Britain was still prepared to consider Italy's claims—all indicate

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that in other respects the League of Nations has not changed. Fundamentally the position of the British and French Governments, and to a lesser degree that of all the other capitalist States represented on the League, is unchanged: to them the League of Nations is only one of the ways of securing their own position, and where possible improving their opportunities for expansion and the exploitation of other peoples. It is this double character of the League of Nations at the present stage that makes it possible for it to take real action against war, and on the other hand makes it necessary to develop at the greatest possible speed the forces which can counter the selfish aims of the ruling groups and themselves step in to decide the course of events.

## VI

### ABYSSINIA—AND ITALY

ABYSSINIA is, in the usual use of the phrase, a backward country. It is not industrially developed. The system of production is more or less feudal, based in theory on the ownership of all the land by the Emperor. All holders of land (including the Church, and nomad tribes inhabiting certain areas) pay some proportion of their crops or herds to the Crown, or have other obligations, such as the maintenance of soldiers or officials, or the provision of labour. The actual workers of the land—who, apart from the serfs working their masters' land, can be called peasants as a general term, bearing in mind the nomad stock-raising tribes—produce only for their own consumption plus the dues which they have to pay for the use of the land. Agricultural methods are very primitive, so that in general the labour of a peasant only produces a very low subsistence plus the

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feudal dues, the latter being usually a tithe of the crop, or four beasts in every hundred. There is therefore little surplus available for foreign trade; in fact, there is very little production for the market.

The natural resources of the country are considerable. The yield of the land—cereals, beans, coffee, cotton, and dairy products, animals and hides—could of course be enormously increased with proper methods of cultivation and better organisation. Sugar and rubber plantations could be developed; the improvement of stock could raise the output of wool. There are valuable timber forests, coal and iron ore deposits, and some gold, platinum and copper.

The Tigre province in North East Abyssinia, in addition to iron ore, contains potash salts, which have been worked by an Italian company for nearly twenty years. The British Foreign Office Handbook on Abyssinia (issued in 1920) contains the following statement on the profit made by this company: "The estimated cost price of the product was £6 per ton; its selling price in 1918, between £50 and

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£54 per ton." It may be added that the selling price in 1935 was about £35 per ton; the cost of production will certainly not have increased since 1918. These figures give some indication of the enormous profits which a wider and more intensive exploitation of Abyssinia's natural resources would bring to foreign capital.

But the chief difficulty in the way is the supply of labour. As in other African areas where production is on a feudal or tribal basis, the people of Abyssinia prefer to work for themselves, in their own way, rather than to work as wage-earners for foreigners. The Foreign Office Handbook remarks :

"The Abyssinian proper dislikes manual work, while the Somalis and Gallas are reluctant *to do more than is necessary for subsistence.*"

They realise, in other words, that under white employers whatever they produced in excess of their own subsistence would go not to themselves but to their employers; and they see no reason why they should work harder to provide employers with profits. If this is really

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the case, what advantage would political control give, for example, to the Italian capitalist?

The answer is to be found in the political methods which can be used to break up the feudal and peasant economy and compel the reluctant inhabitants to work for white masters. In Chapter III examples of such methods applied by British governments in East Africa have been given. The driving of the inhabitants away from fertile soil, and forced labour, prison labour, and compulsion through taxation are almost universal in the African colonies of every State. The standards of living of the people are not raised, but sharply lowered, because they have in effect to be starved into working for the whites; families are broken up, disease spreads rapidly. And the inhabitants of Abyssinia are very well aware that they are fighting to protect themselves from this "tutelage."

But, the Italian Fascists say, we will release the slaves. It is important, in the first place, to point out that the form of slavery practised in Abyssinia is usually described as domestic

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serfdom; the property owners have families of servants permanently attached to their households. The slave trade—chiefly for export to Arabia—still exists, but the Abyssinian Government is making serious efforts to stamp it out. Incidentally, it is usually stated that the export of slaves to Arabia takes place through Italian ports in Eritrea; whether this is true or not, it must be remembered that Abyssinia has no connection with the sea except through Italian, French, or British territory.

In fact, the abolition even of domestic serfdom is the official aim of the Abyssinian Government. An edict of 1925—following on Abyssinia's admission to the League of Nations—provided for the gradual emancipation of slaves, beginning with the children born of slaves; an edict of 1931 freed slaves on the death of their master. No doubt these measures are being evaded to a considerable extent; partly because the serfs themselves, except in cases of harsh treatment, have no desire to be "free," and even when technically free have no other means of living. But this is only one feature of an ancient society which cannot be

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expected to change overnight. On the occasion of Abyssinia's application to join the League of Nations in 1923, the British Government's objection was based on the existence of slavery in Abyssinia. Both the Italian and French delegates, supporting Abyssinia's application, spoke of the efforts which the Abyssinian Government was making to suppress the slave traffic, and the French delegate said :

“ As to the question of domestic serfdom, it must be confessed that many Governments found themselves faced with similar difficulties in their African territories. Such was the case in the French Colonies, the Belgian Congo, etc. . . . ”

It is worth noting that the British Foreign Office Handbook on Italian Somaliland (issued in 1920) says that although there is no slavery in the north, in the south :

“ . . . the Somalis have hitherto employed on agricultural work slaves whom they acquired not by conquest but by purchase, and who constitute the only reservoir of

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labour from which a supply will be forthcoming for some time to come. It was from this source that the Italians obtained labour for road construction. A number of slaves were freed by the Italians, though not without difficulty and some disturbance, but the attempt to liberate them wholesale has now apparently been abandoned.”

Moreover, the 1935 Slavery Report of the League of Nations contains a communication from the Italian Government—dated, by the way, March 1st, 1935, when the propaganda against Abyssinia was in full blast—on slavery or conditions akin to slavery in Italy’s own colonies. In the case of Tripoli the following passages may be quoted :

“ *Abid.* There are frequent cases of men and their families who have remained with their former masters under the old conditions of servitude, either because they are unable to make a living in any other way, or because they are attached to their masters’ families. These are cases of domestic serfdom (domestic servants, guards, watchmen, etc.), or

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agricultural serfdom (cultivating, sowing, ploughing) or serfdom as shepherds, the sole remuneration being maintenance. Such slaves are generally humanely treated."

"*Shuashena*. Here again, we find old slaves who have remained with the families of their former masters. . . . A few individuals or families are also still in a state of servitude on account of old debts; this is not a case of slavery, but merely of working off the debt year by year until it is extinguished."

With regard to Cyrenaica:

"The present situation as regards domestic servitude is uniform throughout the country . . . every well-to-do Arab-Berber family includes . . . one or more negro families. . . . That is, in short, a form of voluntary servitude, which will eventually die out owing to lack of new blood. . . . These remnants of domestic slavery will gradually disappear."

On Eritrea, while the report states that slavery and the slave trade have been completely suppressed, the only reference to

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domestic slavery is the following reference in a quotation from a 1913 report:

“The excessive zeal of certain officials has caused what was actually domestic servitude to be regarded as a condition of slavery.”

As there is no later mention of it, it would appear that this domestic servitude—which is similar to the form in Abyssinia—still continues, and only “excessive zeal” would interfere with it.

In Somaliland too, although the 1935 report states that slavery and the slave trade have been abolished, it adds:

“The institution of domestic serfdom, now generally obsolete, is still preserved, though purely formally.”

The fact is that the existence of slavery, and therefore of the traffic in slaves, is a product of the economic stage reached by many of the African peoples. It is only a hundred years ago that the slaves were emancipated in the British West Indies, and only seventy years ago that slavery was abolished in the United States.

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As the reports of the League of Nations show, it continues to exist, in various forms, in many parts of the world. This is no justification of it, but at the same time the facts given above show how little the existence of slavery can be made a justification for an armed attack on a country.

Finally, before leaving the question of slavery, it is interesting to note the point made by Mr. R. P. Zaphiro, Secretary of the Ethiopian Legation in London, in a recent speech :

“ There exists, I freely admit, employing the word in its strict, and consequently narrow ‘dictionary’ sense, slavery. But it is a state in which the servant is at least assured of a home and sufficient food, together with those little comforts which raise life above a mere existence and which, from that aspect alone, compares favourably with the plight of some two unhappy millions of your own countrymen, not to mention those masses of every nation who are slaves, in all but name, to that hardest of masters—industry.”

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But apart from slavery, there are many other "backward" features in the social and political life of Ethiopia. The population, which is estimated to be between eleven and twelve millions, consists of a number of different racial and religious groups. The Ethiopians proper are the dominant race; they are said to do no work other than soldiering. Production is carried on by the Galla, and in the plains in the north and south, by Danakils and Somalis, largely nomadic, and by negroid peoples. The provinces in the north and south, formerly under independent rulers, were conquered in comparatively recent times by the Ethiopians. Abyssinia is in fact an empire, with subject peoples; but the degree of central control over the outlying provinces necessarily varies with the strength of the Emperor and the provincial governors, and their degree of control over the lesser officials under them. There is a formal constitution, proclaimed in July 1931; the Emperor is now advised by two nominated chambers. In fact, there is little State organisation in the European sense of the word; the State is the Emperor and his governors.

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Nevertheless, it is generally realised that very considerable progress in establishing central control and order throughout the country has been made under the present Emperor, Haile Selassie, and there is certainly justification for the reference made to him by Mr. Zaphiro in the speech already quoted :

“ An enlightened, just and strong ruler, he has therefore been able to exercise control over his dominions as much by virtue of the respect in which he is universally held, as by his hereditary and very real authority.”

There are few State schools, but such education as there is is mainly in the hands of priests and monks. These are very numerous; the *Statesmen's Year Book* estimates that there are about 100,000 ecclesiastics, and states that a considerable proportion of the land is held by the Church, which is Christian, and is connected with the Coptic Church of Egypt. There are Moslems in the north, and pagans in the south. The law is administered by the provincial governors.

Inevitably in such a mixture of races, with a

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feudal system of government and production, a widespread parasitic church, and not as yet very strong connections between the central government and outlying districts, there is occasional official injustice and also robbery and violence, and the economic, social and cultural level of the population as a whole is very low.

But there is an educated and enlightened section of the Ethiopians whose standpoint is expressed by Mr. Zaphiro:

“Ethiopia, often erroneously called Abyssinia, is, as is well known, a wild, mountainous country, difficult of access, in many parts inhospitable in climate, and thus, due to these geographical considerations, as well as to the fierce independence of her people, has been a free nation—the only free nation, incidentally, in the African continent—for over five thousand years. The Persians, the Arabs, the Turks and the Italians have each in their turn essayed, unsuccessfully, to subject us. And it may not come amiss for me to state at this juncture, that these very

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attempts at conquest, particularly during the thousand years war from 700 A.D. to the 18th century, have been in no small measure responsible for the so-called backwardness of our people. Directly, because our energies were of necessity concentrated on the immediate and ever-present problem of defending our Empire, and indirectly, inasmuch as our experience of foreign nations had obviously not been such as to either inspire us with enthusiasm for their ostensible advancement or to render us amenable to the infiltration of bearers of the new ideas. . . .

“Often described as feudal, I can probably best convey to you an accurate impression of the political state of the Empire by inviting you to compare it with Scotland just after the time of the height of the power of the Clans, when their spirit was still strong, but a firm ruler had succeeded in introducing real order and ensuring domestic tranquillity. . . .”

Mr. Zaphiro lays particular stress on the fact that, in spite of the many different

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religions already mentioned, there is no hostility between those of different religious groups :

“ This religious amity is, in fact, a point of the greatest importance, not merely because it provides one of the most significant arguments against the charge made by a certain nation that Ethiopia is not, in fact, a nation united in spirit, but because of its great promise in respect of future progress.

“ The people as a whole are individually ‘ easy-going,’ pleasant, yet fierce and desperate fighters when provoked. The tribes are jealous of their ancient individual traditions, yet are, and have always been, united to a man in the face of common danger. The masses are almost completely uneducated. . . . Many schools have however already been set up by the Government—and, with official approval, by foreign religious bodies—in the chief centres, to educate in those directions likely to prove most useful, those who will be able, either because of their native intellectual superiority

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over their fellows, or of their station, to employ their knowledge to best advantage. For example, while it is the practice of several nations similar to Ethiopia in respect of education generally to send those students who come to European Universities to seats of learning such as Oxford and Cambridge, where courses are mainly of academic interest, my country prefers that its young men should become proficient in engineering, science, agriculture and medicine. . . .”

Mr. Zaphiro's statements have been quoted at some length, because they throw light on the difficult conditions prevailing for the Abyssinian Government, and because their very dignity is in itself an answer to the Italian charges.

The Italian Government submitted a lengthy “Memorandum on the Situation in Abyssinia” to the League of Nations in September 1935. The first part of this memorandum opens with a section on Abyssinia's failure to settle frontiers; failure to allow a road to be built although it had been agreed; refusal

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to allow other roads to be built; refusal to allow foreigners to acquire and hold land—"The Abyssinian Government forbid foreigners from acquiring land and hinder . . . leases in order to prevent the opening of industrial plants."

In so far as the Italian statements are correct, it is necessary to take into account, from the Abyssinian standpoint, that all of these questions are bound up with the determination to avoid foreign annexation or penetration. The question of roads from Eritrea into Abyssinia for example, although represented by Italy as purely commercial, is obviously a military question; the Emperor was not at all anxious for the Italians to have easy access to the country—as events have shown, with very good reason. The refusal to allow foreigners to acquire and hold land, too, is to prevent the displacement of Abyssinia's own people; and the hindrance on leases (limiting them to 15 years) is to control the building of factories by foreign capital—again, with very good reason, because the consequences are well known.

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The second section of the Italian Memorandum deals with "attacks on the safety of the Italian colonies." The allegations made include pre-war incidents, and a number of individual attacks on Italian subjects, besides frontier raids, the Walwal incident (incidentally, only 4 lines are devoted to this in a document of over 70 pages), etc. "And yet another danger must be added to this list. The Abyssinian Government is devoting all its efforts to arming intensively."

It was pointed out above that robbery and violence exist within Abyssinia; no one denies it, and no doubt the feeling against Italians has run high for some time. But the difficulties of the central government are well known, and also its attempts to establish greater control. This applies to the frontier raids; and in fact raids take place not only *from* Abyssinia but also *into* Abyssinia, from British, French, and Italian territory. The Walwal incident has already been dealt with. And finally, the charge that the Abyssinian Government was "arming intensively," to such an extent that it was "another danger" to Italy, is ludicrous; the

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Emperor was merely making some, totally inadequate, preparations against the obviously impending attack from Italy.

The third section of the memorandum is on "Chronic Disorder in Abyssinia," arguing that the Abyssinian Government is unable to maintain order. On this basis, it proceeds to mention the 1891, 1894, 1906, and 1926 Treaties on "spheres of influence," and concludes: "The pre-eminent Italian interest to which juridical recognition is given in the diplomatic acts above referred to corresponds, as already stated, to the *de facto* situation under which Italy—which has urgent and acknowledged need of colonial expansion—is also the Power most seriously affected by present conditions in Abyssinia."

The weakness of the central government has been shown; but the weakness of the Italian case is shown by the attempt to link up this question with Italy's "urgent and acknowledged need of colonial expansion" and treaties which guaranteed Abyssinia's political and territorial integrity.

Part II of the Italian memorandum, dealing

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with the "Political Structure and Conditions of Abyssinia," repeats the statements on the Government's lack of authority, the oppression of non-Abyssinian peoples, and the question of slavery; and finally enumerates a number of barbaric customs and barbarous punishments inflicted in Abyssinia.

There is a part of Mr. Zaphiro's speech already quoted which seems to give a conclusive answer to this section of the Italian memorandum:

"I will point out that the domestic state of Ethiopia, like any other country, is, as is expressly laid down in the League Covenant, no concern of any other nation; and that that insolent charge of mal-administration is automatically refuted by the manner in which the Ethiopian peoples, in the face of insults, provocation, and the gravest of threats to their national integrity, have, to a man, at all times, avoided giving cause for offence to Italy, and have rigorously observed the rulings of their Emperor contingent on his repeated assurances to the League

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of Nations. And observed, I may say, not merely to the letter, but in spirit—in a spirit at which some may wonder, but which is only, after all, what should be expected of a proud, honest and chivalrous people, of ancient traditions, culture and religion.”

It is certainly a remarkable thing that, in spite of the alleged oppression of the people of Abyssinia, only one chief of any importance has deserted to the Italians (and very few of his own men went with him), while on the other hand the people as a whole have rallied under the Emperor's leadership to resist their Italian would-be liberators. The barbaric customs and punishments also exist; but there is no doubt that they have already been modified, and that the Emperor is trying to abolish them. But tradition is not an easy thing to root out, even with a strong central government. Ritual murder, for example, is practised in most areas in Africa and in many other colonial areas. In any case, these barbaric customs are hardly justification for the more wholesale barbarities

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of bombing defenceless people with gas bombs and destroying them with dum-dum and explosive bullets.

And in this connection, it is important for the whole world to realise the inevitable consequences of the Italian barbarities. The statement issued on October 21st, 1935, by the Ethiopian Legation in London, contains a grave warning, not only to the Italians :

“ We observe that his Excellency the Italian Ambassador (in London) has taken the trouble once more to repudiate the charge that Italian forces in Abyssinia have been using bombs containing poisonous gas, dum-dum and explosive bullets—broadcast not only on the Abyssinian troops but on women, children and animals.

“ These repudiations very likely are due to his Excellency the Ambassador naturally giving credit to the reports he has received from Rome. But we beg to state that as there is impartial and technical evidence of a foreign observer to substantiate the charge, we are obliged to submit that his Excellency

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the Ambassador's public denials are based on incorrect information.

"In connection with this unfair and ultra-civilised method of warfare we beg to point out that the use of such diabolical methods of killing the 'savages' who only know fighting bravely with ordinary weapons and as man to man and never kill women, children or animals—will lead to the most unfortunate consequences, not only to the Italians, who will, of course, deserve it, but to all the white people as well, who will be intensely hated by all the people of Africa, and we think of Asia also, for years to come. We take this opportunity to warn the Italian forces that if they continue to use such ghastly methods against the simple, unarmed people, notwithstanding the orders of His Majesty Haile Selassie it will not be possible to restrain the wilder and bereaved section of the Abyssinian army from retaliating in some similar savage method on the Italian soldiers who may happen to fall into their hands.

"Hence we humbly and earnestly beg his

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Excellency the Italian Ambassador instead of troubling to deny what is true, to kindly be so good as to advise his people to fight fairly, if they must fight, a brave and unarmed people."

But in spite of all that can be said about the Italian charges and their very obvious purpose, the fact remains that undesirable features exist in Abyssinia, as the Emperor himself has always recognised. Does the opposition to the Italian invasion mean defence of these conditions? Is the whole feudal system with all its social limitations, its military tendencies, its low level of production and therefore low standard of living and of social organisation, to remain indefinitely in Abyssinia? And if not, how are changes to be brought about?

There are two alternatives. The first is the normal method of imperialism, the establishment of a foreign government which by force, judicial and other forms of fraud, bribery of chiefs, sale of liquor, legislation and taxation, deprives the people of their present means of living—in the main, the land—and forces

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them to work for wages, still producing nothing but subsistence for themselves, but in addition producing profits for their white masters. On this basis, capital will be brought into the country; railways will be built, trade increased, mines opened, plantations developed, and the total production of the country will be raised. There will be a few social improvements—a slight extension of education, because the employment of capital requires some literacy in a section of the workers; some form of medical service; some diminution of local and tribal fighting—though this may be more than balanced for some time by the more ruthless methods of compulsion (such as bombing to secure payment of taxes) and the suppression of revolts against the changes in economic and social traditions. But however much the production of the country is increased, the inhabitants of Abyssinia as a whole will still be getting nothing but a bare subsistence; all the increase in production will be drained off as profits for the monopoly capitalists of a foreign country. At the same time, the foreign capitalists will say: we are fulfilling our sacred

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trust—we are bringing civilisation to these backward people: they have so many additional miles of railway and so many mines and plantations; slavery is abolished, the wages system is established, and those lazy people who won't work for wages are punished; a few schools have been set up, and we are training a few clerks to keep accounts. The foreign capitalists will protest at the suggestion that perhaps the Abyssinians are no better off than they were before; that they have merely exchanged one form of slavery for another, one that will decimate them, break up the family and tribal life in which they have been reared, destroy their skill and courage and turn them adrift in a merciless system of production which wears them down body and soul until it flings them aside, weak and helpless, to make room for new victims to the capitalist god.

Even many Socialists, who see all the evils of imperialist exploitation of the colonics, think that there is no other way; that, with all its evils, the capitalist system is a necessary stage in the development from feudalism to Socialism for every people, and that therefore all that can

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be done is to try to modify its excesses and help the colonial peoples as far as possible. And even though they recognise that the system of the League mandates makes no real difference in the exploitation of the colonial peoples, but represents (as for example in the provisions for free trade) merely a certain bargain between the imperialist groups, they feel that a system of League officials, or in any case more effective supervision by the League, would be a real step forward, a real safeguard and help to the backward peoples.

But the real question is not a question of administration. Of course the more disinterested the administrators, the more experienced they are in how to handle people with different customs and traditions, the fewer will be the revolting excesses which have characterised the administration of every colony. But there is something much more fundamental. The job of the administrators is necessarily to open up the colony to capitalism. And the law of capitalism, how the system works, is quite independent of goodwill and even generous administration. This is not the place

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to make a detailed analysis of the working of capitalism; but everyone must realise that the existence of derelict areas and two million unemployed in Britain is neither an accident nor is it due to the hard-heartedness of our administrators, just as the absence of unemployment in the Soviet Union is neither an accident, nor is it due to Stalin's benevolence. And if there are inescapable laws in the later stages of the capitalist development of every country, so also there are inescapable laws in its early stages. The Enclosure Acts in Britain, the destruction of peasant life and handicrafts, the breaking up of homes and the formation of a mass of helpless, drifting persons who had once worked for themselves, were the background on which, at a later stage, "social reforms" were introduced to modify the worst features of the system.

And the introduction of capitalist production has had the same results in the colonies: for capitalism must uproot former methods of production and create a labour supply which has no other means of existence except working for wages. Afterwards, it is true, it will begin to

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“protect” labour in various ways, to introduce some form of education, health services and the law and order required in a capitalist society; but each economic crisis will work fresh havoc among the colonial peoples—prices fall, and the peasant suffers; wages are reduced and workers are unemployed; and again, because the crisis means more intense capitalist rivalry, the colonial peoples are recruited to suffer the tortures of modern war on behalf of their masters’ interests.

There is, however, another way forward. No one can deny that, for human society as a whole, capitalism represented a step forward from feudalism, gave an immense stimulus to the development of production, and was a necessary stage on humanity’s way towards Socialism. But the development of science and technique brought about by capitalism is now a fact, and it is not necessary for backward countries to pass through the slow historical process of learning for themselves how to build machinery, how to apply science to agriculture. And it is not merely not necessary; in “the strenuous conditions of the modern world” it

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is no longer possible. Backward countries can learn, and will learn, from the experience of the industrially-advanced States. But not necessarily from industrially-advanced States dominated by monopoly capital, whose sole motive for accepting the "tutelage" of the backward country is the winning of a new field for the investment of capital. This terrible stage of production for private profit can be skipped: but only on the condition that the advanced State, which brings to the backward State all the resources of modern science and technique, is a Socialist State.

This has been proved in the backward areas of the Soviet Union; it is being proved in the Soviet areas of China. And the key to the raising of production in Abyssinia without the appalling consequences, first of imperialist conquest and secondly of capitalist exploitation, is that the advance should be for the benefit of the people themselves, and not of foreign monopoly capital. On this basis expert help and advice could be of very great assistance to the Abyssinian people, and war would not be a necessary means of bringing "civilisation" to them.

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Is it conceivable that, so long as monopoly capitalism exists in Britain, France or Italy, any of these Powers would in any way help towards the solution of Abyssinia's backwardness outlined above? The analysis of the economic basis of imperialist expansion, besides all actual history, shows that it is not conceivable. Only a Socialist State could give such help, because it is not in the least interested in drawing profits out of the labour of any people. Only a Socialist State could help the Abyssinians forward, not by driving them from the land and forcing them to work for white masters, but by such methods as have been so successfully applied in the Soviet Union—for instance, the establishment of model agricultural stations, giving practical help to the surrounding peasants and encouraging them by successful example to improve their methods and raise their economic and cultural standards.

This solution, this way forward for the Abyssinian people, may seem unreal at a moment when the other, the imperialist solution, is being attempted by force of arms, and the other imperialist vultures are standing by

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to divide the carcase. But at least it is important that everyone who really desires the welfare of the Abyssinians should realise, above all, that the maintenance of Abyssinia's independence from both political and economic control by capitalist States is not postponing "progress" there, but is safeguarding the Abyssinians against the most brutal and rapacious exploitation, and in fact hurrying forward the day when Socialist help can bring them real economic and cultural advance. This leads on to the question of the significance of Abyssinia's resistance to Fascist aggression for the general movement of the working class towards Socialism which is discussed in later pages. Here it need only be said that the confidence in Socialism, the certainty of victory for Socialism in the struggle against Fascism and imperialist war, is the only real basis for the support of Abyssinia's independence, a basis which will prevent people from being led away by specious arguments about the benefits which capitalism brings at the same time as it spreads destruction and misery on the colonial peoples. And not only on the colonial peoples.

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The Abyssinian Government might well have prepared a memorandum, "On the Conditions in Italy." And the first section of it might have contrasted the border raids from Abyssinia, conducted by relatively small groups in defiance of the Emperor's authority, with the immense preparations made by Italy's Government to conduct a raid of conquest on Abyssinia.

But with regard to the internal conditions in Italy, what are the facts which such a memorandum might have cited?

In the first place, on the economic field. Production, on the basis of 1928=100, fell to 72 in 1932, and averaged only 80 in 1933, rising only with the development of war industry in 1934. Italy's exports, which were over 15,000 million lire in 1929 and 10,000 million lire in 1931, had fallen to 5,232 million lire in 1934. Imports fell from 21,665 million lire in 1929 to 7,666 million lire in 1934. The State debt in December 1934—before the real drive for war—had increased 15 per cent since 1931.

As for conditions of labour: the official number of unemployed early in 1933 was

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1,225,000, and even after the munitions boom was well under way, in December 1934, the official figure was over 960,000. Of those workers who are registered as employed, a considerable proportion is on short time. As for wages, the official hourly wage rates show a reduction between 1930 and the end of 1934 of 18 per cent for industrial workers and 25 per cent for agricultural workers. One of the Italian reports on Tripoli already quoted says of the pay of certain negroes who are domestic serfs: "... the sole remuneration being maintenance." It is extremely doubtful whether many Italian workers, although paid in money, get even maintenance for their remuneration; the unemployed certainly do not. In 1932 the annual sugar consumption per head in Italy was 15 lbs.; in Great Britain it was 98 lbs. Official average weekly earnings for male workers in Italy in 1932 were: industrial 27s.; agricultural 18s. There have been continuous reductions since then. Only a small proportion of the unemployed get any allowance whatever.

In regard to the increased intensity of labour, it is difficult to express in statistics the speeding

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up that has taken place; but in two years to 1933 the number of looms per weaver had been trebled in the cotton industry, and doubled in the woollen.

The breaking up of the workers' political, trade union, co-operative and social organisations was carried out with murder, torture and barbarities of every kind.<sup>1</sup> Arbitrary arrests and cruel punishments have continued since the establishment of the Fascist Government in Italy. All forms of democratic government have been abolished.

The economic, social and political conditions in Abyssinia are the result of a stage of development which, in its general features, is common to most of the African peoples. It is universally admitted—except perhaps now by Italy—that a certain progress has been made under the present Emperor. The Abyssinian Government's protest to the League in 1926 against the Anglo-Italian Agreement of December 1925, states the position with reason and dignity:

<sup>1</sup> For these and other facts on Italy under Fascist rule, see R. P. Dutt's *Fascism and Social Revolution*.

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“Nor must it be forgotten that we have only recently been introduced to modern civilisation and that our history, glorious though it be, has not prepared us for ready adjustment to conditions which are often quite beyond the range of our experience. Nature herself has never gone forward by sudden bounds, and no country has been metamorphosed in a night.

“With our well-known eagerness for progress—given time and the friendly advice of countries whose geographical position has enabled them to outdistance us in the race—we shall be able to secure gradual but continual improvements which will make Abyssinia great in the future as she has been throughout the past.”

On the other hand, the economic, social and political conditions of the majority of the people in Italy during the last thirteen years, represent a definite reversal of all the progressive tendencies which were associated with the development of capitalism in Europe. In Chapter IV it has been shown that this is not accidental, and not the result of the individual

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character of a Mussolini or a Hitler. It is the outcome of the development of capital accumulation to the point where there is chronic over-production, crisis and unemployment; not an absolute over-production in the sense that humanity's needs are satisfied, but a relative over-production, because the system of production for private profit sets limits to the market. But in this stage of chronic crisis the small groups of monopoly capitalists continue to sell *their* goods, to make *their* profits, to accumulate still more, while the smaller capitalists, the peasant producers and the workers suffer. The expanding force of monopoly capital accumulation is faced with the resistance of the workers, and seeks temporary solution in Fascism, in the destruction of the workers' organisations and of all progressive tendencies; and if it is successful in this, it goes forward all the more unhampered and brutal in its drive for expansion, for the vaster and more ruthless act of war.

It is this desperation, born of its insoluble economic difficulties and of its even more urgently threatening social difficulties, which is

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the most essential feature in both the home and foreign policy of Italian monopoly capital, acting through Mussolini and his Fascist Government. And the question of Italy's future is therefore far more urgent and vital for the progress of humanity than the question of how rapidly and by what means feudalism can be abolished in Abyssinia. A State which is unable to control groups of its subjects from making sporadic raids on neighbouring tribes is far less of a menace to humanity than a State which deliberately organises continuous brutal repression in its own country and war on an immense scale beyond its borders. It is this simple comparison which is in essence the basis of the general sympathy for Abyssinia at the present time.

But, as in the case of Abyssinia, any real change in conditions in Italy cannot be brought about by the conquest of Italy by other capitalist Powers, or by the assignment of a League mandate over Italy to some other Power or group. It can only be brought about by the action of the Italian people themselves: by the overthrow of the Italian Fascist Government and the establishment of a revolutionary

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workers' government which will be in a position to solve both the economic and the social and political hardships which the Italian peoples are enduring to-day. And this action, by removing the economic basis of Italy's expansionist aims, will also solve the problem for humanity raised by the existence of Fascist Italy.

But although the actual overthrow of the Fascist system must be the work of the Italian people themselves, the action of other people, and particularly of the working class in other countries, can be of tremendous help to them. In fact, in the present situation, there are factors which make the action even of capitalist States of use to the Italian working class, while the determined resistance to the Italian invasion shown by the Abyssinians is also helping the Italian working class in its struggle against Fascism. These are points which are fully discussed in the next chapter, in connection with the attitude of the British Labour movement—and the international labour movement—on issues arising from the conflict between Abyssinia and Italy.

## VII

### THE OPPOSITION TO THE WAR

IN THE LAST CHAPTER it was said that the situation caused by the rise of Fascist States had created a widespread and almost instinctive feeling of sympathy with Abyssinia in its fight against Fascist Italy. On the other hand, the failure to understand that the situation is new has resulted in the greatest confusion in the ranks of certain sections of the British Labour movement, and has thrown these sections into strange alliances. The issues raised by war are so tremendous that it is not surprising that on every occasion a considerable part of the Labour movement in every country is thrown off its feet, and that one section is always and irresistibly led into a negative, a passive attitude, because it feels its own impotence in the violence of the storm.

But hard facts prove the truth of Litvinov's phrase at Geneva: peace is indivisible. It is

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impossible, in the present stage of history, for any war to be waged in any part of the world without seriously and immediately affecting the whole international position. And in such a situation, although individuals like George Lansbury, prompted by the highest sentiments, may stand aside, there can be no standing aside on the part of organisations which seek to represent the interests and desires of large sections of the population. This is all the more evident if the real character of Fascism is understood, if it is seen not as the mental aberration of misguided individuals but as the instrument of the richest, most brutal section of monopoly capitalists in its struggle against the working class and against the rival groups of monopoly capitalists in other countries. Peace is indivisible in the sense that any war must entangle other States; and war is indivisible in the sense that in every war the issue of the class war, of the struggle between monopoly capital and the working class, necessarily rises as the dominating issue for the working class in every country. And in these times, when the class war is more and more taking the

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immediate character of a people's struggle against Fascism, the fact that the Italian war on Abyssinia is a Fascist war, brings not only the working class in the usually accepted sense, but all those sections of the population who are very deeply opposed to Fascism and war, into a unity of purpose which a clear understanding of all the factors involved may weld into a common policy, a common action. This is the background against which the declared policy of sections of the British and international labour movement can be seen most clearly. This is the basis on which they must be judged and by which the whole future policy and action of everyone opposed to Fascism and war must be determined.

The first formal declaration of the policy of British Labour on the Abyssinia situation was made by the Trades Union Congress at Margate on September 5th, 1935. It had before it a resolution based on a statement of policy adopted by a joint meeting of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress and the Executives of the Labour Party and Parliamentary Labour Party. The essential passages

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in the resolution (1) recorded the conviction that the existence of Fascist dictatorships, notably in Italy and Germany, had fostered the spirit of militarism ; (2) declared for a collective peace system within the League of Nations ; and (3) called upon the British Government, in co-operation with all League members :

“ to use all necessary measures provided by the Covenant to prevent Italy’s unjust and rapacious attacks upon the territory of a fellow-member of the League.”

(A further section of the resolution, proposing a World Economic Conference, is dealt with later.)

The resolution was adopted by the Trades Union Congress by 2,962,000 votes to 177,000. The same resolution was brought forward at the Labour Party Conference four weeks later, and after a long discussion it was adopted on October 2nd, by 2,168,000 votes to 102,000.

The resolution, as will be noted, concentrated on urging the League to take “ all necessary measures provided by the Covenant,” i.e.

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sanctions, and the main line of division at both the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party Conference was on the sanctions issue.

It is not necessary to examine the opposition based on the extreme pacifist standpoint of George Lansbury. But a more serious opposition—in the sense that it put forward arguments that do not depend merely on individual sentiment—came from the supporters of the Socialist League, whose policy was put forward by Sir Stafford Cripps.

His argument was that in the application of sanctions the British National Government would be actuated by the purely selfish, imperialist aims of British monopoly capitalism, and that therefore the support of sanctions by the Labour movement would be in fact the support of imperialist aims, and would involve the risk of supporting an imperialist war of Britain against Italy.

“Had we a workers’ Government, as they have in Russia, the whole situation would be completely changed. With a Socialist Government there would be no risk of

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imperialist and capitalist aims being pursued. To-day it is certain they are being and will be pursued."

Therefore, at present, in the opinion of the Socialist League, the Labour movement should oppose sanctions. The Socialist League at the same time advocates independent working-class action, but its main practical propaganda has been against sanctions. Sir Stafford Cripps had indicated, at the Socialist League London Conference on September 14th, even a policy of aloofness:

"The only contribution which we can make to the solution of the problem is to build up as rapidly as possible a convinced Socialist opinion in the country."

What is wrong with this argument? It rejects, or in any case ignores, the section of the Labour Party resolution which records the existence of Fascist dictatorships, notably in Italy and Germany. It therefore does not proceed on the basis of the fact that the attack on Abyssinia is not *merely* an imperialist attack,

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but also a Fascist attack. Nevertheless, although the Labour Party's resolution included a recognition of this fact, it did not draw all the necessary conclusions, but concentrated attention on the collective peace system within the League of Nations and the application of sanctions by the League. It was this concentration on the League of Nations which gave the Socialist League's opposition a certain plausibility. Many of its supporters regarded the issue as being *either* full confidence in the League of Nations, and therefore in the British National Government as a member of the League, *or* lack of confidence in the British National Government, therefore in the League, and confidence only in a British Socialist Government—which being non-existent at the moment meant inaction, standing aside except for Socialist propaganda, and opposition to any international action, including sanctions and war, in which the National Government was concerned. The issue appeared in short as an issue of Rights versus Lefts: collaboration with the National Government in its imperialist aims, or working-class independence.

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But had the framers of the Labour Party's resolution drawn the full conclusions from their recognition of the fact that the Italian Government was *Fascist*, it would have been evident that the basis for Labour support of the League of Nations and sanctions *in this particular case* must be not only the preservation of peace but also the defeat and possible overthrow of Fascism in Italy. It is the fact that the application of sanctions must to some extent hamper the prosecution of the war by Italy, weaken the chances of Italian victory, and therefore weaken the position of Fascism in Italy, that makes it in the interests of the working class that sanctions should be applied. Moreover, the extent to which sanctions are applied—that is, their effectiveness for the purpose just stated—depends (particularly in France, but also in Britain) on the strength of the demand for sanctions from the working-class organisations and from all who are against Fascism.

It is the tragic failure to understand this special feature of the Italian attack on Abyssinia that has led the leaders of the Socialist League and of the Independent Labour Party

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into the position of being against sanctions, and has made it possible for them to carry on a propaganda parallel to that of the Fascists and of the press which supports the Fascists. And their mistaken standpoint on this question not only disorganises the Labour movement at this critical period, but also by dividing the Socialist League and Independent Labour Party from the main stream of the anti-Fascist movement, makes them impotent to raise effectively other and correct criticisms of the Labour Party's policy as expressed in the resolution.

The attitude of the Independent Labour Party has been particularly dangerous. One of its leading members has even put forward the view that the only workers who are called upon to act in the war between Italy and Abyssinia are the workers of those countries, whose duty it is to overthrow their own governments and bring the war to an end. He does not appear to be aware that Abyssinia is a feudal country, not capitalist, and that there are no workers there in the sense of workers capable of organised action. He also seems to

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forget the position of the workers in Italy, who need all the help that the international labour movement can give them in the fight to overthrow Fascism. A manifesto issued by the Independent Labour Party on September 23rd, 1935, even asserted that:

“The threatened war is defended on the ground that it is necessary for the League of Nations to intervene to defend Abyssinia against Italian imperialist aggression. . . . Can any worker or working-class organisation be misled? The threatened war is not for the defence of Abyssinia against Italy. It is for the defence of British and French imperialist interests against Italian imperialist interests. This capitalist quarrel is not worth the life of a single British worker.”

Of course it is true that the conquest of Abyssinia, or of some share in looting Abyssinia, for Italian or British monopoly capitalism, is certainly not worth a single worker's life; but the victory of Abyssinia, the defeat of the Italian Government's plans, and the discrediting and overthrow of Fascism in Italy

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—these are aims for which the working class in every country should be willing to make considerable sacrifices.

As already indicated, the weakness of the Labour Party's policy is its exclusive reliance on sanctions operated by the League of Nations. For if, in this actual war, the main object of the Labour movement must be to hamper and weaken Italian Fascism, then independent working-class action with this object in view is also necessary to anticipate, to hasten forward and make more effective any action taken by the League of Nations and the governments of each country. But there was not a word of this in the resolution adopted by the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party Conference.

It is precisely this independent action by the working class in each country which would not only bring real pressure on its government to apply effective sanctions, but would also give the labour movement the initiative, and prevent it in Britain from following blindly at the tail of the National Government into imperialist adventures—the danger foreseen by

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Sir Stafford Cripps if all reliance was placed on League sanctions. And apart from preparing the Labour movement against imperialist actions by the National Government, the policy of independent working-class action would also have helped materially to the achievement of the aim set by Sir Stafford Cripps—the bringing into power of a Socialist Government. Because this independent action was not included in the policy agreed on by the Trades Union Congress and Labour Party, it was possible for the *Daily Herald* to identify this policy with the National Government's policy in its editorial of September 12th, 1935, entitled "The Voice of Britain," on Sir Samuel Hoare's speech at Geneva.

And because this independent working-class action was not included in the Labour Party's policy, it has been possible for the National Government to put itself forward as the Defender of the Peace, as the leader of the movement to stop the Italian attack on Abyssinia.

The facts given in earlier chapters show beyond any possibility of doubt that in the

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whole of its relations with Abyssinia and Italy the British National Government has been concerned first and foremost with obtaining advantages for British monopoly capitalism in Abyssinia. Its friendly tolerance, if not open encouragement, of the Japanese attack on China shows how far it has been actuated by any moral considerations or anxiety to maintain the League of Nations as an effective instrument of peace. Its reluctance to allow the Abyssinia issue to be brought before the League of Nations in the early part of 1935 (i.e., at a period when definite League action might have prevented the war), its repeated attempts to find a basis for a tripartite division of Abyssinia, its willingness at any moment to accept a solution on this basis, while at the same time it presses for sanctions and strengthens its war forces to take what advantage it can of the position to push its claims—these are the realities of its policy, cloaked behind verbal loyalty to the League of Nations, to the cause of peace.

The policy of using League sanctions as one of the means of furthering the interests of

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British monopoly capitalism is not the policy for which the overwhelming majority of the delegates at the Trades Union Congress and Labour Party voted when they voted for the Executive's resolution approving sanctions. Nor is it the policy which has brought the overwhelming majority of the Labour Party rank and file and of the people of Britain behind the demand for sanctions. Nevertheless, the wording of the Labour Party's resolution, the absence of any reference to independent working-class action, the lack of any analysis of the National Government's policy (although this was made by the official speakers), enabled the National Government to make useful electoral capital out of the pretended identity of its policy with the policy "of the British people as a whole."

A summary of the Communist Party's policy on the situation was published in the *Daily Worker* of October 2nd, 1935, the day when the discussion on this issue opened at the Labour Party Conference. It includes the two following paragraphs :

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“(1) Stoppage of all war materials to Italy and refusing to load or unload any Italian ships at present in British ports. Closing of the Suez Canal to all Italian transport.

“(2) Support of the policy of sanctions as a means of preventing Italian Fascism going to war against the Abyssinian people, and redoubling of efforts to organise the defeat of the National Government and secure the return of a Labour Government on the basis of united struggle for the preservation of peace, the defence of democracy, and the improvement of the conditions of the workers.”

Had the Labour Party Conference based its declaration of policy on these points—independent working-class action, support of sanctions, opposition to the National Government's aims and the call for a Labour Government as the only guarantee at the present time that a real policy of peace would be pursued—then the National Government would not have approached the election with such confidence, and there would have been far less confusion

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throughout the Labour movement and other sections of the people who are sincerely opposed to imperialist policy and war. It is possible that the Socialist League might not have opposed sanctions when put forward in this way ; certainly the speech made by Sir Stafford Cripps would have lost most of its point.

The Communist Party's standpoint is based on the considerations already stated—that the essential feature of this war is that it is being waged by a Fascist government, and that it is in the interests of the working class, and of every section of the people opposed to Fascism, to hamper the Italian Government, to weaken and discredit it, in order to help the people of Italy to overthrow it. On this point the overwhelming majority of the Labour movement would undoubtedly agree with the Communist Party.

But there are other considerations advanced by the Communist Party on which there would not be such agreement, partly because the implications of the situation are not so clearly seen by other sections of the Labour movement, and partly because of a general difference of approach to the issues of the class

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struggle between the working class and monopoly capital.

One such consideration is the part played by independent States or nationalist movements in weakening the power of monopoly capitalism, and thereby helping the working class in its own struggle. The Communist Party looks on the Abyssinian resistance to Fascist Italy's aggression not only as the fight of a weak State against a stronger State—a basis for sentimental sympathy which has undoubtedly played its part in forming opinion in every country—but as the fight of an ally of the working class against the main enemy of the working class: Fascist monopoly capitalism.

It is only when the Abyssinian resistance to Italy is seen as a part of the process of weakening Fascism and strengthening the working class that the workers will not allow themselves to be deluded by such arguments as, "Abyssinia is a backward country, with barbarous customs and slavery, and no one need care what happens to it." As was shown in an earlier chapter, the sooner the overthrow of Fascism and monopoly capitalism in the advanced

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industrial countries, the sooner it will be possible for the workers in those countries to help Abyssinia out of its backwardness. And in the meanwhile, in spite of its backwardness, Abyssinia represents a real ally of the working class in other countries.

Another consideration advanced by the Communist Party is that independent working-class action to hamper Italian Fascism—the stopping of munitions and supplies of all kinds intended for Italy, the refusal to unload or handle Italian goods arriving in this country—not only is a direct blow at Fascism, but also prepares the working class for independent action of all kinds to hamper any British Government which pursues an aggressive policy, or tries to use League action, supported by Labour in order to stop war and defeat Fascism, for the purpose of advancing the interests of British monopoly capitalism. There is a very real danger of this, as the whole history of the National Government's proposals during 1935 has shown. And the only effective action that can be taken against it is independent working-class action, based on the

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determination to hamper the Italian Government now and, when the need arises, also the British Government, in the interests of the international working class and of its immediate ally, the people of Abyssinia.

Such independent action was taken by workers in South Africa even before the war started. Early in September the dock workers at Capetown refused to load meat intended for the Italian army; their action was supported by the central Trade Union organisation, the Cape Federation of Labour. Later in the month the British National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives instructed its members to cease to handle orders of boots for the Italian army. Immediately after the Italian invasion of Abyssinia began the Conference of the South African Labour Party adopted a manifesto in which, after urging the application of sanctions, a call for independent action was made:

“Should the Government fail to impose economic sanctions against Italy, the conference appeals to all South African workers

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to impose such sanctions in a practical manner by refusing to handle goods designed to reach the aggressor State.”

At the same time, Greek seamen at Alexandria refused to handle Italian supplies of war material, and Marseilles dockers held up the loading of an Italian transport. And on October 8th, both of the Dockers' Unions in France issued a joint instruction to their members to refuse to load or unload any Italian ship in French ports:

“In view of the arrangement made to struggle against Fascism and war by the last congress, and by reason of Italy's attitude, the Federation of Port and Dock Workers feels it to be its duty to show its desire for peace.

“Boycott being the means considered to be necessary, in agreement with the International Transport Workers' Federation, which has consulted us on this subject, the Federation requires its branches not to load or unload any Italian vessel and to apply in this manner a complete boycott.”

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It was clear that the movement for independent working-class action was gathering strength, and that if the policy had been adopted as the official working-class policy on an international scale, in every country action would have resulted.

On September 25th, a week before the actual opening of the war, the Communist International, uniting the Communist Parties in all countries, invited the Labour and Socialist International, of which the most important members are the British Labour Party and the French Socialist Party, to enter into immediate negotiations to secure united working-class action throughout the world. The message, which was signed by Dimitrov, contained the following passages :

“ It is necessary to unite the efforts of the two Internationals in order to maintain peace. They must act in concert and by their common efforts stay the hand of the Fascist instigators of war.

“ The common action of the two Internationals would mobilise the working class and

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would secure the support of the forces of peace among other classes of the population. It would draw whole peoples into the fight for peace.

“ It would call forth an international movement against war of such a power that the League of Nations, under its pressure, would be compelled to undertake really effective action against the aggression of Italian Fascism and German Fascism.”

On October 7th the Communist International again appealed to the Second International for prompt action :

“ The fact that joint action by both Internationals was not immediately achieved undoubtedly encouraged the Fascist war incendiaries to proceed with open military action.

“ Now that so much time has already been lost it is all the more our duty and yours at this moment to put a stop to military action and prevent the war from spreading to other parts of the world. . . .

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“ In the interest of peace and in the name of the millions of workers in our ranks and yours who demand joint action in the struggle against war and Fascism, we once more stress the urgency of a favourable reply from the Executive of the Labour and Socialist International to our proposal.”

The proposal made by the Communist International was at last considered by the Executive of the Labour and Socialist International on October 12th; owing to the opposition of the British Labour Party and three other Socialist Parties the proposal was refused, but at the same time a loophole was left for joint discussions. The resolution ran :

“ As regards the invitation from the Communist International to meet four representatives appointed by that body, the Socialist Parties in Britain, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Czechoslovakia have stated that they cannot accept this invitation.”

“ The Executive of the Labour and Socialist International is obliged to take into account the views of these great Parties of the working

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class, and it therefore is unable to accept the invitation of the Communist International.

“ The Executive of the L.S.I. desires to make every effort to co-ordinate all effective action against war and the Fascist fomenters of war.

“ Therefore it goes without saying that its chairman and secretary are at liberty, in the exercise of their functions, to hold conversations for purposes of information with persons and representatives of other international working-class organisations or other organisations carrying on action against war as they may think fit.”

It was commonly stated that one of the chief reasons of the British Labour Party in refusing to agree to negotiations with the Communist International was the fear that association with the Communist International might have a bad effect on the middle-class voters at the General Election. This view is in any case so widely held that it is worth examination. No one denies that the middle-class vote is important in elections, and that even apart from elections

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it is essential for the working-class organisations to win the support of other sections of the population. But all experience shows that this support is won, not by a cautious, inactive policy, but by working-class action of such a decisive character and on so large a scale that it necessarily attracts all individuals in other sections of the population whose general sympathies are humanitarian and peaceful. In Britain itself the general strike in 1926 roused very widespread middle-class support for the strikers, and the South Wales demonstrations in February 1935 against the Unemployment Assistance Boards drew in practically the whole population. It was the same in France when the Socialist Party and the Communist Party joined in common action against Fascism, and organised immense demonstrations; within a very short time the left wing of the Radicals was drawn in, and the "People's Front" secured substantial electoral gains. The fact is that for the Labour Party to stand aside from the organisation of international action on the ground that it might lose them votes is far more likely to send the middle class

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into the arms of the Fascists than to bring them closer to the Labour Party.

Nevertheless, in spite of the opposition, led by the British Labour Party representatives, to negotiations for international action, the obvious urgency of the situation, and the fact that in many countries the Socialists and Communists were already working together, resulted in informal discussions being opened in the second half of October. It is certain that any joint action decided on will have very great influence on the course of events, and will enable the working class in each country not only to fight effectively against Italian Fascist aggression, but to act as a barrier against any extension of the conflict in the interests of their own ruling class.

## VIII

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FROM THE MOMENT that Italy's attack on Abyssinia began, everyone felt that the danger of a new world war had become imminent. The economic difficulties of the last few years at least—if not of the whole period since the war—had led to universal economic warfare in the shape of tariffs, quotas, exchange restrictions and increased armaments in obvious preparation for a new war. The only question was when and how it would begin: but it had become quite clear that it would begin with one of the Fascist States. What was not clear was what was to be the attitude of the people who are opposed to Fascism and war—that is to say, how their opposition was to be expressed. Had war begun as an attack by Fascist Germany on the Soviet Union, the issue would have been quite clear to both Socialists and pacifists. But already even this issue had

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become complicated by the Franco-Soviet Pact of Mutual Assistance, which meant that France as a State would be involved : and France as a State meant French monopoly capitalism. French monopoly capitalism would not fight German monopoly capitalism out of love for the Soviet Union or hatred of Fascism, but for its own interests. Therefore, it was argued by Socialists who like history served up simply, that although the Soviet Union would be fighting a war of defence for Socialism, France would be fighting an imperialist war for imperialist ends, and no French workers should support such a war.

But in real life it is necessary to take into consideration not only the motives but also, and more particularly, the objective result of actions. A Fascist Germany able to fling all its forces to the east would be a most serious menace to the Soviet Union. But the position would be quite different if half its forces had to be reserved against attack from the west. The motive of the French Government might be the plunder of Germany, or defence of French monopoly capitalism against future

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attacks from Germany ; but the objective result of a French counter-attack on Germany must be the protection of the Soviet Union, a gain for Socialism. The French Socialist therefore could not oppose the war : he must do everything to make the war successful, to ensure the defeat of Fascist Germany, if he is to do his duty to international Socialism ; and in striving to ensure the defeat of Fascist Germany, he must do everything in his power to ensure that the war is fought with this sole object, and that the French and German Governments do not, at some stage in the war, come to some agreement which in effect means sacrificing the Soviet Union to the joint interests of the two imperialist States.

It is this question of the step which is necessary in a particular situation that is the vital point for Socialists confronted with the Italian attack on Abyssinia. In no case can revolution and the establishment of a revolutionary government be regarded seriously as an immediate issue, except for the workers of Italy. For the workers in other capitalist countries the main immediate object of their

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policy and action must be to help the Italian workers to overthrow Fascism, by supporting every action that tends to discredit and undermine the Italian Fascist Government. This is the way in which, for example, the British workers and all who are opposed to Fascism can help to defeat Fascism not only in Italy and Germany, but also in Britain. But in their attempt to weaken the Italian Fascist Government, British workers must take into account all the forces which are at the moment, whatever their motives, hostile to the Italian attack on Abyssinia. One of these forces is the British Government, representing the interests of British monopoly capitalists; and there are other similar capitalist governments represented in the League of Nations, as well as governments formed by Socialist Parties, nationalist capitalist (i.e., to some extent anti-imperialist) governments, and the government of the Soviet Union. The League of Nations, therefore, is another real force which has to be taken into account; and it is capable of action which actually hampers the war and undermines the Italian Fascist Government. But it

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would not be a real force at all but for the various States on which it rests, and it would not have been capable of action but for the fact that these States—each with its own motives and in varying degrees—were for the moment united in opposition to this particular war.

The British Socialist cannot oppose action which undermines Fascism, cannot oppose sanctions; on the contrary, he must do everything in his power to secure the fullest possible use of sanctions, and the prevention of any agreement between the British Government and the Italian Government at the expense of Abyssinia. This means, as already indicated, independent working-class action, and the attempt to displace the National Government. It is not an alliance with British monopoly capitalism, but forcing the hand of British monopoly capitalism in the same way as the demonstrations against the Unemployment Assistance Board scales forced their withdrawal in February 1935.

But what if, as the result of the enforcement of sanctions, the Italian Government was to

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open hostilities on Britain or Egypt? Would a Socialist, sincerely opposed to imperialist war, support a British war against Italy? Could there be any guarantee that British monopoly capitalism would not use the occasion to develop a purely imperialist war against Italy, to its own advantage?

This issue has been raised by the Socialist League and other opponents of sanctions. But the answer is clear enough, if the *purpose of the working class* in supporting sanctions is understood. It is obvious that every effort would have to be made, by Socialists and Communists in every country, to ensure that it was not, so to speak, a private war between Britain and Italy, but a joint military defence of the sanctions measures in their concrete application, and a joint military defence against any aggressive measures taken by Italy against any one of the States concerned. There is no other alternative; if the Socialists were to stand aside and even oppose such united international action, they would objectively be helping Italian Fascism and encouraging similar aggression by German Fascism. But of course they would also do

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everything possible, by political pressure and independent working-class action, to limit the action of their own governments and to prevent any imperialist plans from being carried out; and they would endeavour to replace any existing reactionary government by a government which would genuinely support the League's collective action and also the collective final settlement of the war.

And this leads on to the question of what kind of settlement is possible of the war between Italy and Abyssinia. If the central theme of this book is accepted—that the main issue for the working class and all who are against Fascism is to discredit and undermine the Italian Fascist Government—it is evident that any form of settlement which gives Italy any advantages whatever as a result of the war must be opposed. This is the fundamental principle, quite apart from any considerations of justice for Abyssinia. And it is possible to unite on this issue not only Socialists and Communists and all other anti-Fascists, but also all opponents of war, whether pacifists or not. It is obvious that any victory for Italian

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aggression would be a tremendous encouragement to German Fascism, already threatening the world with war. For Italy to gain any benefit from this war would be to make a new war, starting from Germany, an immediate certainty.

Therefore not only a settlement imposed by Italy on Abyssinia must be rejected, but any form of tripartite division of Abyssinia, whether covered up in League mandates or not, must be equally opposed.

This is clear enough. But there is in existence in the Labour movement a feeling that, as admittedly the motive force making for war is economic, the danger of war can be lessened by a "fair" distribution of economic resources among the capitalist States. The resolution adopted by the Trades Union Congress early in September, and by the Labour Party Conference in October, contained the following paragraph (apart from the paragraphs relating to the League of Nations and sanctions which have already been quoted):

"While resolute in refusing to countenance any resort to war in flagrant violation of

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international treaties or to permit Italy to profit by any act of aggression, this Congress recognises the imperative necessity of eradicating the evils and dangers arising from the economic exploitation of colonial territories and peoples for the profit of imperialist and capitalist powers and groups. We therefore call upon the British Government to urge upon the League of Nations to summon a World Economic Conference and to place upon its agenda the international control of the sources of the supply of raw materials, with the application of the principle of economic equality of opportunity to all nations in the undeveloped regions of the earth."

In his speech on September 11th, 1935, to the Assembly of the League of Nations, Sir Samuel Hoare paid considerable attention to this question; the following extracts show his approach to it:

"Abundant supplies of raw materials appear to give peculiar advantage to the countries possessing them. It is easy to exaggerate the

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decisive character of such an advantage, for there are countries which, having little or no natural abundance, have yet made themselves prosperous and powerful by industry and trade. Yet the fact remains that some countries, either in their native soil or in their colonial territories, do possess what appear to be preponderant advantages; and that others, less favoured, view the situation with anxiety. Especially as regards colonial raw materials, it is not unnatural that such a state of affairs should give rise to fear lest exclusive monopolies be set up at the expense of those countries that do not possess colonial empires. It is clear that in the view of many this is a real problem. And we should be foolish to ignore it. It may be that it is exaggerated. It may also be that it is exploited for other purposes. None the less, as the question is causing discontent and anxiety the wise course is to investigate it, to see what the proposals are for dealing with it, to see what is the real scope of the trouble, and if the trouble is substantial to try to remove it.

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“The view of His Majesty’s Government is that the problem is economic rather than political and territorial. It is the fear of monopoly—of the withholding of essential colonial raw materials—that is causing alarm. It is the desire for a guarantee that the distribution of raw materials will not be unfairly impeded that is stimulating the demand for further inquiry. So far as His Majesty’s Government is concerned, I feel sure that we should be ready to take our share in an investigation of these matters.”

But, he went on, in present circumstances there is no question of any colony withholding its raw materials from any prospective purchaser: “On the contrary, the trouble is that they cannot be sold at remunerative prices.” Nevertheless, there was no objection to an enquiry, and the terms of reference should put emphasis on the “free distribution of such raw materials among the industrial countries which require them, so that all fear of exclusion or monopoly may be removed once and for all.”

Of course there is everything to be said for

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any measures that can be taken by the League of Nations to prevent the exercise of monopolies by capitalist groups. And it is even possible that agreement on selling prices of raw materials might be reached, and also on a proportional distribution of any raw materials of which there was a world shortage. Such agreements between capitalist groups have been brought about in the past even without the intervention of the League of Nations. But in an economic situation in which each country is constantly setting up barriers to trade from other countries, just because of its own difficulties in finding a market for its products, any international agreement arrived at would not be likely to have a very long life.

Nor is it justifiable to assume that in the present stage the mere possibility of obtaining raw materials at a price which was the same throughout the world would have much influence in satisfying the colonial ambitions of any imperialist State. If the analysis given in Chapter III is correct, the real driving force in colonial expansion is the need of monopoly capital to find a field of investment for its

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constantly accumulating profits. In other words if colonial raw materials are taken as an example, the desire of Italian monopoly capital is not for the raw materials—which, as Sir Samuel Hoare pointed out, it could get at free competitive, and even low, prices in the present situation—but for the opportunity of investing capital in the production and transport of these raw materials. In other words, it is a desire for the profit made on producing and transporting them. And this desire cannot be satisfied by the most complete and perfect price-fixing arrangements made by the League of Nations. The friction caused by the monopoly of certain products being in the hands of certain national groups—for example, the Anglo-Dutch rubber monopoly—is relatively unimportant. Certainly neither the Japanese aggression in China, nor the Italian attack on Abyssinia, have any source in their exclusion from supplies or in specially high monopoly prices for the products which they hope to get from Manchuria or Abyssinia.

But if “the application of the principle of economic equality of opportunity”—the phrase

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used in the Labour Party resolution—has any wider meaning than the unfettered supply of raw materials at fixed prices; if the “economic equality” referred to is the equality of opportunity for investment, this must mean a very considerable redivision of existing colonial territories. And such a redivision was hinted at by Sir Samuel Hoare in another part of his speech, in which he referred to “demands for change,” which:

“will have to come about by consent and not by dictation, by agreement and not by unilateral action, by peaceful means and not by war or threat of war.”

But the fact is that the essence of the demand for change, for the redivision of colonial areas between the Powers, is the demand that one national group of monopoly capitalists should hand over its fields of investment to another national group. And in society as it stands to-day, this demand is not likely to be satisfied. Some very partial readjustments, of course, are always possible, but always on a commercial basis—on the basis of exchange or purchase in

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one form or another. An example of purchase is the acquisition by the United States of Danish islands in the West Indies; and of another form of exchange, the cession to Italy of a strip of French territory, adjoining the Italian colony of Libya, in 1935, as a part of the general Franco-Italian agreement directed against Germany. Such partial readjustments, however, are of very little significance, and it is very doubtful indeed if any attempt to secure a more far-reaching redivision of colonial territories would have any chance of success.

From the standpoint of an observer who has no desire except to avoid war, it is possible to call on the monopoly capitalist groups in the various countries to be "fair" to each other, to meet in conference and arrange a share-out of colonial possessions. But this is exactly the same as asking these groups not to be monopoly capitalists, to give away their capital to their rivals instead of trying to use it themselves and make further profits on it. Speaking on September 9th, 1935, Mr. George Lansbury in effect put this appeal to British monopoly capitalism:

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“The economic law of the jungle which is the cause of war must be abandoned and the true spirit of justice and co-operation take its place. Our nation is the greatest Imperialist power in the world. We have built up great possessions. The same call which Christ gave to the rich young man is calling to us. We are given the opportunity to place our all on the altar of common service. We must be prepared to share the natural sources of wealth which are ours with the rest of mankind.”

In essence, the Labour Party, in the paragraph of its resolution quoted above, is making the same appeal as Mr. Lansbury. And to believe that any response to such an appeal is *possible* in existing society is to fail to understand the causes of colonial ambitions and war.

The fact is that the only way of removing the causes of war is to put an end to the system of production for profit and establish Socialist States throughout the world. So long as there are powerful groups of monopoly capitalists in the industrially-developed countries, so long

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will the drive for colonial expansion continue, and so long will this mean war between the capitalist States and the backward nations, and between capitalist States themselves. And the League of Nations cannot be the machinery for the abolition of monopoly capital and its replacement by Socialism.

But although the League of Nations cannot eradicate the causes of war, it can at least be of very real service in the preservation of peace. It cannot reconcile the conflicting interests of rival capitalist groups, but it can do a great deal to prevent the conflict resulting in war. The League of Nations, however, has no existence apart from the States of which it is composed, and the preservation of peace by the League depends on the determination of at least a substantial majority of these States to maintain peace by collective action. In the world to-day, is such a substantial majority, including at least some of the most powerful States, a practical possibility?

Undoubtedly it is, if only for the reason that, as in the Italian war on Abyssinia, some of the larger States are almost certain to be in conflict

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with the aggressor State. Again, the smaller and weaker States are also directly interested in the preservation of peace, which is almost the same to them as self-preservation. Then there are the States, whether small or large, in which the working class has been able to put in office a Labour or Social Democratic Government, and to exert sufficient pressure to ensure its acting in the interest of peace. It is the extension of this group of States—that is, the election of Labour or Social Democratic governments (or, as in France, of a government supported by an anti-Fascist “ People’s Front ”), in a larger number of States—which is the most immediate issue for all who wish to preserve peace and to strengthen the collective action against war which, at this stage, the League of Nations can provide. And finally, the fact that the Soviet Union exists, that there is no group within it which needs to find any field of investment, makes the Soviet Government the leading force in the group of governments which, for one reason or another, are at any time interested in the preservation of peace. In his speech at the Assembly of the League of

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Nations on September 14th, 1935, Litvinov said:

“For the Soviet delegation there is no question of siding with one or the other party to the conflict, or of defending any one’s interests. As you know, the Soviet Government is in principle opposed to the system of colonies, to the policy of spheres of influence, to anything pertaining to imperialist aims. For the Soviet delegation there is only a question of defending the Covenant of the League as an instrument of peace.”

Such a grouping will necessarily be led by the Soviet delegation, because it alone has, so to speak, unmixed motives in its efforts to preserve peace; it alone is not subject to the influences, if not the control, of monopoly capitalist groups. But it will be enormously strengthened by the inclusion of additional delegations from Labour or Social Democratic governments, or governments based on a “People’s Front.”

What is at stake in the application of sanctions to Italy therefore goes far beyond even

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the issues which have already been indicated. The failure to apply sanctions, or the withdrawal of important Powers in order to make a bargain with Italy, would throw back the whole development of a collective peace system. The success of sanctions, the holding together of the States applying sanctions, until Italy, the aggressor, is forced to stop the war and give up any territory won by force of arms, would be an enormous achievement, a strong factor for the prevention of future war. On this issue every section of the population which is sincerely opposed to war should be united—and it should draw the necessary conclusion: the need for the replacement of reactionary governments which directly represent the interests of finance capital (as their whole record of international intrigue proves), by governments essentially based on the working-class movement. This conclusion is necessary because in the present state of the world the only effective resistance to war, the only hope of strengthening the League of Nations as an instrument for peace, can come from the working class and those other sections of the population who

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have no material interest in imperialist rivalry or the exploitation of other peoples. It is not necessary to repeat the arguments of earlier chapters to show that the same conclusion must be reached by all who are sincerely opposed to Fascism. Therefore, whatever the further developments and whatever the outcome of the Italian war on Abyssinia, all sections of the population in every country who are opposed to Fascism and war, whether previously associated with the Labour and Socialist movement or not, must realise the urgency of working to secure progressive governments, which in the present state of things means a Labour Government in Britain, a "People's Front" Government in France, and Social Democratic Governments in other capitalist countries.



